

**Teachers' experiences of including children  
and families from Asian cultural  
backgrounds in early childhood education**

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## Contents

<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Introduction.....	8
What is culture? .....	10
Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand.....	12
Te Whāriki - the Early Childhood Curriculum .....	16
Culturally Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Education .....	22
Rights to Culturally Inclusive Early Childhood Education .....	23
Cultural Exclusion .....	25
Research.....	27
<b>Chapter 2. Literature Review .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Introduction.....	29
Attitudes and Values .....	30
Cultural and Linguistic Differences.....	33
Knowledge and Understanding about Teaching Children from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds .....	38
Linking Theory to Practice .....	40
Teachers Becoming and Being Culturally Competent.....	45
<b>Chapter 3. Methodology .....</b>	<b>49</b>
Introduction.....	49
Paradigms and Research Culture in Early Childhood Education .....	49
Positivist.....	50
Interpretivist.....	50
Post-structuralist .....	51
Interpretivist Knowledge and Methodology .....	52
Qualitative research .....	54
Research Strategies Used in this Project.....	56

Interviews.....	56
Questionnaires.....	58
Research Process.....	60
Ethical considerations .....	60
Gaining consent .....	61
Interviewing early childhood teachers .....	63
Questionnaires.....	65
Poor response rate .....	67
My attempt to address the poor response rate.....	67
Data Analysis .....	68
<b>Chapter 4. Findings .....</b>	<b>71</b>
Introduction.....	71
Perceptions of Asian Families .....	71
Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Teaching.....	75
Sameness approach .....	77
Meeting Asian parents' expectations and needs.....	79
Responses to Including Children and Families from Asian	
Backgrounds .....	81
Approaches used to Support Children and Families from Asian	
Backgrounds .....	85
Building meaningful relationships with Asian families .....	85
Interest in expanding cultural knowledge .....	86
Being receptive to new ideas and different worldviews .....	88
Using children's first language in curriculum .....	89
Using a range of teaching strategies .....	91
Reflecting cultural diversity.....	95
Employing culturally diverse teachers.....	102
Recognising and reducing discrimination.....	103
Using self-review and research to improve teaching practice .....	105
Benefits of Creating a Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Setting .....	106

Barriers to Creating a Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Setting.....	107
Communication difficulties .....	108
Cultural knowledge .....	109
Attitudes and understanding gaps .....	110
Resources .....	111
Progressing Inclusive Education for Asian Children and Families .....	113
Teachers from Asian backgrounds.....	113
Professional development for teachers .....	114
Information and resources in family's home language .....	116
Support from other professionals.....	117
Designated non-contact planning time.....	118
Additional funding and grants .....	119
<b>Chapter 5. Discussion .....</b>	<b>120</b>
Introduction.....	120
The importance of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Teaching .....	121
Barriers to and Facilitators of Quality Early Childhood Education for Asian Children and Families.....	124
Teachers' attitudes towards Asian culture.....	125
Communication difficulties .....	128
Cultural awareness and knowledge.....	129
Meeting parents' expectations and cultural assimilation.....	132
Strategies for Progressing Cultural Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings.....	133
Relationships between teachers and families.....	134
Teacher education .....	135
Professional development for teachers .....	137
Information evenings for families.....	139
Resourcing: Financial support and equity funding .....	140
The Need for Further Research.....	141
Conclusion .....	142

<b>References .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>167</b>
Appendix A.....	167
Appendix B .....	178
Appendix C .....	191

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates New Zealand early childhood teachers' understanding and experiences of teaching and including children from Asian backgrounds, in particular, Korean, Chinese and Japanese cultures. In Aotearoa New Zealand, participation in early childhood education of diverse ethnic groups is growing every year. Since 2004, the largest growth in enrolments has been among Asian ethnic groups, with an increase of 90%. The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki, states "there are many migrants in New Zealand, and, as in any country with a multicultural heritage, there is a diversity of beliefs about childrearing practices, kinship roles, obligations, codes of behaviour, and what kinds of knowledge are valuable" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 18). It is therefore important that teachers in the early childhood education service sector are able to effectively respond to the holistic learning needs and well-being of children and families from different ethnicities. This research explores what culturally inclusive and responsive teaching means in the New Zealand early childhood setting and looks at some of the barriers to and facilitators of creating learning environments that meet the needs of children from Asian cultural backgrounds.

Data was collected through interviews and questionnaires from teachers working in different early childhood centres in Christchurch. The information gathered was reviewed and evaluated using thematic

analysis and the findings were considered in the context of a number of themes – from the teachers’ perceptions of Asian parents and families as influenced by their own experience, to their ideas about progressing inclusive education for children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds. This work highlights some strategies that may help progress cultural inclusion. It also outlines current research and identifies the need for more exemplars for teachers and for further research in this area.



## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

### **Introduction**

In Aotearoa New Zealand, participation in early childhood education of diverse ethnic groups is growing every year. Since 2004, the largest growth in enrolments has been among Asian ethnic groups, with an increase of 90% (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5). Moreover, as the Asian population in New Zealand continues to grow, it is predicted it will be significantly higher than other minority ethnic groups by 2026 (Bedford & Ho, 2008). The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki, states “there are many migrants in New Zealand, and, as in any country with a multicultural heritage, there is a diversity of beliefs about childrearing practices, kinship roles, obligations, codes of behaviour, and what kinds of knowledge are valuable” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 18). It is therefore important that teachers in the early childhood education service sector are able to effectively respond to the holistic learning needs and well-being of children and families from different ethnicities.

As an early childhood teacher, I have worked with children and families from many different cultural backgrounds, including New Zealand born and migrant children and families of Asian descent. I have noticed the number of Asian children attending early childhood services is increasing,

and that many early childhood teachers have difficulties communicating with Asian children and their families, even from the beginning of the enrolment process. These difficulties are often due to language barriers, cultural differences and a lack of knowledge and understanding from the point of view of both the Asian families and the teachers.

Most early childhood teachers do their best to meet the needs of children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds, and develop and implement strategies they believe to be culturally responsive and inclusive. Such strategies and practices, however, often reflect their own life experiences and discourses – including their perceptions of Asian children and families – and may not necessarily be culturally inclusive and responsive for children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds (Arndt, 2014; Wu, 2013). There is little information available in early childhood education literature about inclusion and teaching of children from Asian cultures. Further research in this area would be of considerable benefit, as we work to ensure early childhood settings are fair and equitable places for children from diverse cultural and minority backgrounds.

This study investigates teachers' attitudes towards and experiences of teaching children from Asian backgrounds within early childhood settings. It aims to gain insight into what culturally inclusive and responsive early

childhood education might look like in practice for these children and their families. Of particular interest is the way in which teaching and including children from Asian cultural backgrounds is viewed and experienced by teachers within some early childhood education settings.

This chapter will explore various definitions of culture and discuss the current situation of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as multicultural aspects of the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). It will also consider culturally inclusive and responsive practices and cultural exclusion in early childhood education.

### **What is Culture?**

Before any discussion about culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood education can take place, it is important to define what is meant by “culture”. So, what is culture? Everyone has his or her own culture and culture has a significant influence on the way each individual acts and behaves (Bredekamp, 2014; Kearns, 2014; Smith, 2013). Culture has been defined by many researchers, educators, scientists and philosophers. The three examples that follow highlight key themes common to most definitions.

Culture is defined by Grey (2010) as “the broad patterns of behaviour that are determined by beliefs and values of groups of people that are shaped and reshaped over time, and passed from one generation to the next” (p. 49). Bredenkamp (2014) states “culture encompasses customs, ritual, ways of interacting and communicating, and expectations for behaviours, roles, and relationships that are shared by members of a group” (p. 173). Kearns (2014) defines culture as the shared knowledge and beliefs that are created and accepted by a group of people who live in the society. It is:

Something we are all a part of, something that guides our values, beliefs and practices, something that many people are prepared to defend with their lives, something that is often used as a weapon against others, something that people love, something that people hate, and something that we learn (although not consciously).

(Kearns, 2014, p. 210)

Morrison (2014) states “culture determines the food children eat, the kind of care they receive or do not receive from their parents, and helps determine how they view and react to the world” (p. 5).

As discussed earlier, Aotearoa New Zealand has become increasingly multicultural, and the largest increase in education enrolments has been among Asian ethnic groups in early childhood settings. There are

more and more migrant and New Zealand-born Asian children, who grow, learn and develop within a multicultural context. Both culture and context influence children's learning and development (Grey, 2010). Children develop within the culture and context of their surroundings. Therefore, teachers' awareness and understanding of the impact of culture and context are crucial in supporting and enhancing learning and development.

### **Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand**

High-quality early childhood education is valued in Aotearoa New Zealand, in particular, for the role it plays in helping children get a good start in learning and life, especially for those at risk of poor educational achievement such as children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2011b; Education Review Office, 2013; Smith, 2013). Early childhood education is not compulsory, but research indicates children who participate in high-quality early childhood services benefit in many ways, including building positive relationships with others, communicating and expressing ideas, developing physical and cognitive skills and building dispositions for successful learning (Ministry of Education, 2008; Smith, 2013). When children have a positive experience of early childhood education, they are more likely to become confident and

competent learners and perform well at school (Ministry of Education, 2011a; Ministry of Education, 2014). Given that 96% of all children under the age of five participate in some form of early childhood education, it is vital that the sector is appropriately funded and supported by government so all children are provided with high-quality education and care (Ministry of Education, 2013). As Smith (2013) states “Investment in early childhood has benefits, not only for children, but for families and for the society at large through supporting cultural survival, economic productivity, and more equitable distribution of wealth and education” (p. 112).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a range of different early childhood services available to meet different children’s and families’ needs, with teacher-led or parent/whānau-led services being the main types offered (Lee, Carr, Soutar, & Mitchell, 2013). Teacher-led services include kindergartens, education and care, and home-based services. Within kindergartens and education and care services, 80% of teachers are required to be qualified and registered, or 50% of teachers if working with children under two years of age. In home-based services, qualified and registered teachers provide guidance and support to untrained educators to ensure quality education and care is provided. In parent/whānau-led services, which include Kōhanga Reo, playcentres and playgroups, parents and

families/whānau are responsible for the management of the centre and for teaching and taking care of the children. Qualified supervisors and teachers may oversee programmes, and training is provided for parents and whānau to help them in their role as educators of their children. Parents who run playgroups are not required to have any training. Kōhanga Reo and Pasifika Early Childhood services are designed to meet the specific learning, language and cultural needs of children and families from indigenous or other minority cultures (Education Review Office, 2007; Lee et al., 2013). In 2013, education and care centres (72%) and kindergartens (18%) were the main services accessed by children and families of Asian descent (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5).

As noted, there is considerable diversity in the early childhood education service sector in New Zealand, including different cultural perspectives, operational and structural differences, and a range of philosophical emphases. Some services are community based and others are privately owned. Community-based early childhood services, including kindergartens, are not-for-profit and offer affordable quality education and care to children and families. Privately owned centres are often for-profit and parents are expected to pay substantial fees for childcare services. Quality can sometimes be compromised in favour of profit (Johnston, 2015).

Services are funded differently by the Government, depending on their structure. For example, teacher-led services receive a higher rate of funding than parent/whānau-led services. Currently, government funding does not adequately cover the costs associated with providing high-quality early childhood education; so all services charge fees or require donations from families, grants or other income streams to meet (or exceed) minimum quality standards (Education Review Office, 2007).

Early childhood services must meet minimum quality standards as set out in the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 (New Zealand Government, 2008). Key aspects of high-quality early childhood services are subject to Education Review Office (ERO) assessment. In high-quality early childhood services, educators are required to respond to diverse children's strengths and needs through adapted teaching programmes and strategies, and provide a thoughtful learning environment that enables all children to become competent and confident learners and communicators (Education Review Office, 2007; Ministry of Education, 1996). The Government is focused on increasing quality early childhood education and achievement levels for all children, but especially priority learners (Education Review Office, 2013), and teachers are expected to provide meaningful educational programmes to meet those children's needs. Priority



learners include infants and toddlers, Māori and Pasifika children, children with special needs and children who speak English as an additional language. For this reason, an ERO review also looks at how an early childhood service responds to diversity and how it promotes positive learning outcomes for all children (Education Review Office, 2013).

### **Te Whāriki – the Early Childhood Curriculum**

Te Whāriki is the New Zealand early childhood curriculum. It helps promote quality early childhood education for children from birth to school age, usually at 5 years old, but not compulsory until age 6. The reason for having this curriculum document is “to provide a curriculum framework that will form the basis for consistent curriculum and programmes in chartered early childhood education services” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 10). Te Whāriki has four principles, five strands and 18 goals that guide New Zealand early childhood teachers’ practice. Each principle, strand and goal recognises and supports each child’s uniqueness, identity, culture, ethnicity, rights and need for equitable learning experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand (Lee et al., 2013).

Te Whāriki is based on socio-cultural theory emphasises that “education and learning will be empowering, holistic, ecological and

relational” (Lee et al., 2013, p.26). Every early childhood service is therefore expected to recognise and respond to the social and cultural beliefs and values of its community of children, families and teachers (Education Review Office, 2013). The children’s culture, language, ethnicity and identity, as well as their families’ beliefs and values need to be reflected, considered and embraced in early childhood programmes. Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) is designed to ensure all children have equitable opportunities to learn and participate fully in their education. Moreover, the aspiration of Te Whāriki is for all children “to grow up as confident and competent learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

There are many things that make Te Whāriki innovative and distinctive, including its focus on children’s rights and cultural responsiveness (Lee et al., 2013; Smith, 2013). The principles, strands and goals in Te Whāriki specifically recognises cultural diversity in early childhood services and highlights teachers’ responsibilities to embrace it.

Empowerment–Whakamana states children should “develop an enhanced sense of self-worth, identity, confidence, and enjoyment” (Ministry

of Education, 1996, p. 40). It also emphasises equitable learning opportunities for all children.

Holistic Development–Kotahitanga recognises the cultural dimension is as important as the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive dimensions in a child’s development, because every dimension connects to the others. As such, teachers should have an “understanding [of] the views of other cultures in the community” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 41), and encourage children to “understand and respect the different cultures which make up our society” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 41).

Family and Community–Whānau Tangata also recognises the importance of respecting different cultures in early childhood education programmes. Teachers need to be aware that “different cultures have different child-rearing patterns, beliefs, and traditions and may place value on different knowledge, skills, and attitudes ... [and that] culturally appropriate ways of communicating should be fostered” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 42).

Relationships–Ngā Hononga highlights that “children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 43). Therefore, it is crucial that early childhood teachers provide a culturally responsive learning environment and

resources, and have positive attitudes towards children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Well-being–Mana Atua is about promoting children’s well-being in a responsive and safe learning environment, where teachers provide programmes that support positive self-esteem.

Belonging–Mana Whenua emphasises the importance of “acknowledgment of different family styles, and knowledge of the cultures of the children in the programme” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 55). It also mentions “children’s confidence in, and identity with, the cultures of both their country of origin and of New Zealand should be fostered” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 55).

Contribution–Mana Tangata focuses on children’s rights and equitable learning opportunities for all in early childhood services. It states teachers “should establish programmes and strategies which actively promote equity of opportunity for children and counter actions or comments that categorise or stereotype people” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 65). In every early childhood service, “children’s cultural values, customs, and traditions from home should be nurtured and preserved to enable children to participate successfully in the early childhood setting and in their community” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 65). Moreover, “the

programme should encompass different cultural perspectives, recognising and affirming the primary importance of the child's family and culture" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 65). As with Belonging–Mana Whenua, Contribution–Mana Tangata highlights the importance of teachers' having an understanding and awareness of different values, beliefs, practices and attitudes in their centre and community. Teachers should provide programmes that recognise and respect different parenting and child-rearing styles of different cultures, in order to promote the children's confidence and self-identity in both the home and education setting.

Teachers should also promote the children's home language. Under communication–Mana Reo, it states "communication reinforces the child's holistic development of a concept of self, enhancing their recognition of their spiritual dimension and the contribution of their heritage and environment to their own lives" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 72). Therefore, teachers "should respect and encourage children's home language ... [and] policies should be in place to support children for whom English is not the home language and to support those who do not have verbal skills" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 73).

Exploration–Mana Aotūroa emphasises the significance of children forming positive attitudes and expectations of learning, and regarding

education as a learning journey – hence the need for teachers to understand their responsibility to support and encourage the children in their care.

Teachers “need to be aware of different attitudes within the community to values and behaviours, such as co-operation, physical contact, sharing food, crying, or feeling sorry, and deal positively with any inconsistencies”

(Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 65).

The Te Whāriki approach acknowledges that developing a strong self-identity and self-esteem is vital for the well-being and learning of all young children. To form a positive self-concept and to learn and develop to their potential, children must experience environments where they and their families are respected and valued (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008; Ministry of Education, 1996). For children from Asian backgrounds, attending and participating in an early childhood service that welcomes, accepts and includes them for who they are positively impacts on their developing identities (Ministry of Education, 1996; New Zealand Government, 2008). On the other hand, if these children experience inequitable early childhood environments then this can limit their rights, sense of well-being and belonging, and learning opportunities (Guo, 2012; Guo & Dalli, 2012). Culturally inclusive and culturally responsive education gives children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds the opportunity to participate and

be fully involved, and thus reap the benefits of early childhood education (Colvin, Dachyshyn, & Togliaso, 2012; Guo, 2012).

### **Culturally Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Education**

Culturally inclusive and culturally responsive early childhood education is about ensuring children and families can participate on the “basis of who they are, and without threat to their individual cultural identities, values, beliefs and practices” (Macfarlane, Macfarlane, Savage, & Glynn, 2012, p. 180–181). Teachers who practice in culturally inclusive and responsive ways have reciprocal relationships and active engagement with culturally diverse children and their families, and show respect towards their language and culture. They ensure children’s diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are reflected in the curriculum, and their learning needs are respected and responded to in culturally appropriate ways. Teachers who adopt culturally responsive pedagogies also identify and eliminate barriers to play, learning and participation, to enable children from different ethnic backgrounds to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be successful learners (Macfarlane et al., 2012; Ministry of Education, 1996; Ministry of Education, 2011b).

## **Rights to Culturally Inclusive Early Childhood Education**

As early childhood is often the first formal education setting children and families experience, it is essential that services are welcoming, culturally inclusive and responsive, and of a high quality (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008; Lee, Butler, & Tippins, 2007). In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is legislation, policies, strategies and plans that support children's and families' rights to culturally inclusive early childhood education. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), the Human Rights Act 1993 (New Zealand Government, 1993), the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008 (New Zealand Government, 2008) and Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Article 30 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) emphasises that every child and his or her family have the right to “enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or [and] to use his or her own language” (p. 9). Article 29 states:

The education of the child shall be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate,



and for civilizations different from his or her own. (United Nations, 1989, p. 9).

The Human Rights Act 1993 prohibits any discrimination related to religious, beliefs, race, ethnicity or culture. In particular, under Section 57, , it is:

Unlawful for an educational establishment, or the authority responsible for the control of an educational establishment, or any person concerned in the management of an educational establishment or in teaching at an educational establishment, to refuse or fail to admit ... to deny or restrict access to any benefits or services provided by the establishment, or to exclude a person as a pupil or a student or subject him or her to any other detriment by reason of any of the prohibited grounds of discrimination. (New Zealand Government, 1993, p.30)

According to the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008, every child should learn and experience through a curriculum that “encourages children to be confident in their own culture and develop an understanding, and respect for, other cultures; and respects and

acknowledges the aspirations of parents, family, and whānau” (New Zealand Government, 2008, p. 31).

Further, teachers’ obligations and responsibilities to respect children’s rights to language and culture are also framed by Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), Kei Tua o te Pae (Ministry of Education, 2004–2009), the Practising Teacher Criteria (Education Council, 2015a) and Code of Ethics for Certified Teachers (Education Council, 2015b). And yet, despite the good intent of this inclusive legislative and policy context, Smith (2013) highlights that “within Aotearoa New Zealand, it is a challenge to ensure this right to language and culture is realised for children of Māori, Pasifika or other language heritages” (p. 176).

### **Cultural Exclusion**

It is teachers who put legislation, policy, strategies and plans into practice – and early childhood teachers in the 21st century are expected to have the dispositions, knowledge, skills and attitudes to successfully do this and be inclusive of all children (Education Council, 2015a). In recent years Asian ethnic groups have shown the largest growth in early childhood education enrolments, and numbers will continue to increase as the Asian population in Aotearoa New Zealand grows (Bedford & Ho, 2008; Ministry

of Education, 2013). Teachers' attitudes towards, and knowledge of, Asian cultures is therefore vital to ensure these children and families experience a high-quality teaching and learning environment.

Cultural exclusion can occur when teachers do not respond respectfully and appropriately to cultural differences – for example, in relation to language, parenting styles, beliefs about education and learning, and the teacher's role. The effects of cultural exclusion have been discussed by some researchers. Cultural exclusion and prejudice can negatively affect children's identities, well-being, learning and development. It also affects families' relationships with teachers, participation in the education setting, and sense of belonging (Kearns, 2014; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011; Smith, 2013).

As the research shows, culturally inclusive and high-quality early childhood education remains elusive for some children and families from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Colvin et al., 2012). Unfortunately, government cut-backs have removed initiatives that contributed strongly to enhancing quality in the early childhood education sector, such as a 100% qualified workforce and professional development funding (Lee et al., 2013; McLachlan, 2011). This may have implications for early childhood teachers as they struggle to respond to the pressures of greater cultural diversity and

expectations on them to accomplish more for every child. If teachers are to honour the rights and needs of all children, however, it is important they enact their professional responsibilities and commit to meeting these challenges head-on.

### **This Research**

This research is designed to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, teaching children from Asian backgrounds (in particular, Korean, Chinese and Japanese cultures). It looks at how early childhood teachers understand and respond to these priority learners, who usually have and learn in more than one language. The study determines how culturally responsive and inclusive some early childhood teachers' practices are, and provides the means for teachers to reflect on their own understandings and teaching practices, with regard to the growing sense of identity and experiences of Asian children in the early childhood sector.

In the following chapters, I investigate further the complex issues around cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the Theory and research related to cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education. In Chapter 3, I discuss different research methodologies and the methodology used in this project.

In Chapter 4, I present the thematically analysed findings of this research.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss barriers to culturally responsive practices and facilitators of culturally inclusive teaching, and highlight the need for further research in this sensitive area.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

As with all families, when families of Asian descent come into an early childhood centre it is important they believe it is a place where they can feel welcome and belong (Ministry of Education, 1996). Asian parents want their children to be happy, respected and included. They also want their children to be well cared for and to receive a high-quality education, so they can learn and develop to their fullest potential (Riley, Gichuru, & Robertson, 2012; Kearns, 2014). Research and education policy indicates that for children to learn effectively their diverse cultures, languages and identities need to be acknowledged and responded to positively in the early childhood setting (Ang, 2010; Ministry of Education, 1996). Teachers need to work in partnership with families to ensure the service provides for the learning needs of each child, as well as families' expectations and goals. In some early childhood centres this occurs, but in others children and families from Asian backgrounds do not experience quality early childhood education.

This study investigates New Zealand early childhood teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, teaching children from Asian cultural backgrounds. A review of the literature revealed there is limited empirical evidence available based in the New Zealand context. Nevertheless, this

chapter provides an overview of current literature and findings related to culturally responsive and inclusive early childhood education for Asian children and their families, and the implications of providing culturally inclusive education for all. It explores some of the factors that support or hinder quality education, and discusses culturally inclusive and exclusive practices in early childhood settings – including attitudes and values, cultural and linguistic differences, knowledge and understanding about teaching children from diverse cultural backgrounds, and the importance of teachers becoming and being culturally competent.

### **Attitudes and Values**

The ideas, values and assumptions teachers have about Asian cultures, and the ways they approach teaching and including children from Asian backgrounds, are clearly important to ensure a quality early childhood education experience for children and families of Asian ethnicity. Teachers' attitudes towards, and responsibilities to, children and families from different ethnic groups are shaped by discourses. A discourse is a set of ideas that affect how people see and interpret the world around them, which can change over time in response to experience (Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Purdue, & Surtees, 2012; Smith, 2013). People create and build their own

understandings and meanings about differences, such as, gender, age, religion, disability, socioeconomic status and ethnicity, through the discourses available to them. Various discourses exist that view and interpret each topic differently. For example, if the discourse taken up by an early childhood teacher reflects a monocultural approach to teaching and learning, it can lead to negative outcomes for Asian children and their families. On the other hand, if teachers position themselves within discourses that are grounded on inclusive education, social justice and human rights principles, their teaching would embrace equity in education for children from different ethnic groups (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2012).

Research indicates that teachers do have different attitudes towards children and families of different ethnicities (Harlin, Sirota, & Bailey, 2009). Some teachers have more positive attitudes towards certain ethnic groups, as a result of their personal experiences and background. A teacher's attitude towards teaching and including children from different cultures can, either positively or negatively, affect children's and families' educational experiences. If there is a "cultural mismatch" between teachers and families values and beliefs, this could negatively affect the children's and families' rights to quality early childhood education (Colvin et al., 2012; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2012).



Research has highlighted some of the attitudes prevalent in early childhood education that can result in negative experiences and exclusion for children and families from diverse ethnic backgrounds. These attitudes include:

- Parents and children should learn and improve their English language and follow the rules of the dominant culture (Lee, Butler, & Tippins, 2007; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011).
- Parents need to be told what is best for their children because they lack understanding of early childhood education in a Western country (Arndt, 2014; Chan, 2011).
- Asian parents are so strict and want their children to read and write from a very young age (Guo, 2013).
- Asian parents are hard to communicate with. They don't like getting involved in their child's education (Guo, 2005; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011).
- Displaying a Chinese flag and dragon is a way of celebrating multiculturalism (Chan, 2011).

Research (Kearns, 2014; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011) indicates teachers' misconceptions and stereotypical views about children from minority cultural backgrounds limit equitable learning opportunities. For

example, some teachers believe children with limited or no English need to speak English at all times. Children, however, are capable of learning both English and their home language (Kearns, 2014). Speaking their home language is significant, as it can be a cultural tool to enhance and extend their learning (Guo & Dalli, 2012). Although some Asian families do alter traditional practices and beliefs, expecting them to only learn and follow the mainstream culture sends a message that their culture is not acknowledged or valued in the education setting (Guo, 2006). It affects how children develop and form their self-image, self-esteem and cultural identity (Kearns, 2014).

Asian families have different cultural practices, values and beliefs. Teachers who teach from a monocultural approach are more likely to ignore these cultural differences, which will negatively affect how they interact with Asian children and families (Pappamihel, 2004). If teachers are not accepting and tolerant of cultural diversity, then tensions can rise between teachers and these families (Kearns, 2014).

### **Cultural and Linguistic Differences**

Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards' (2010) research indicates that teachers have an important role to play in constructing and promoting children's positive social identity. As young children build a strong

foundation of self-concept and identity, it is crucial for them to learn in an environment where their home culture and language is valued. Visibility and involvement of the child's family in the curriculum and early childhood centre is a significant factor in enhancing a positive self-concept. Working in partnership with parents of learners with English as an additional language is important, because it gives children confidence that their family and cultural background is viewed positively within the early childhood education setting. It also helps teachers respond better to children's needs and strengthens the dispositions, knowledge and skills of each child (Mistry & Sood, 2015; Ministry of Education 1996).

Supporting children to develop a positive identity can be difficult when there is a gap between teachers' and parents' beliefs about the purpose of early childhood education. Immigrant families have their own cultural traditions, beliefs and values about child-rearing and education, which may differ from the dominant culture (Mistry & Sood, 2015; Zhang, Keown, & Farruggia, 2014). For example, according to Guo (2012), Asian parents measure their success by their children's academic achievement. The background of this belief is Confucianism, which has a strong influence in most Asian cultures. Right from the start, parents have high expectations for their children and want them to be successful and achieve to a high level.

Children's education is the number one priority in the family. As parents often assume their children will look after them when they are old, their children's education is one kind of investment for life after retirement.

Many Asian parents decide to emigrate for a better life, and their aspirations for their children's education increase when they move to another country (Guo, 2014). Urdan and Monoz (2012) state "the act of immigrating itself can be considered a hopeful act as immigrants sacrifice relationships and familiarity with the culture in the native country for greater opportunities in the new country" (p. 248). But settling into a new education system can be difficult and daunting for Asian immigrants, as educational understandings and experiences are generally philosophically and contextually different.

Play and active exploration, for example, are important in children's learning and development in New Zealand early childhood settings (Ministry of Education, 1996). This philosophy, however, does not sit well with some Asian families. According to Guo (2014), many Asian parents are not satisfied with the early childhood education their children experience in New Zealand. They expect their children to be engaged in high academic learning programmes, but this does not appear to happen. For Asian parents and families, spontaneous play and active exploration is not valued or recognised as learning. Asian parents believe children learn best through structured

programmes that require them to be passive learners (Chan, 2006; Chan, 2011). This example and others like it highlight that communication barriers and cultural and educational misunderstandings between teachers and families need to be appropriately addressed in order to better support children's learning and future success (Chan, 2011; Mistry & Sood, 2015). As a starting point, New Zealand's early childhood teachers need to have a better understanding of Asian parents' aspirations for and expectations of their children's education, and they should attempt to reduce the understanding gap between these expectations and experience.

Guo (2012) and others (Arndt, 2014; Devarakonda, 2013; Mistry & Sood, 2015) highlight that children with English as an additional language experience discontinuous learning opportunities between home and early education centres as a result of cultural and linguistic differences. With limited cultural awareness and understanding, teachers can find it difficult to recognise and meet children's learning and developmental needs. To prevent this, teachers should be open to and value different families' traditions and beliefs, and encourage parents to share their funds of knowledge to make early childhood education settings more culturally inclusive. Teachers should try to communicate and build a positive partnership with migrant families, especially when the teachers' culture is different from the families' culture.

Effective communication is key to knowing and understanding diverse cultural backgrounds (Riley et al., 2012).

Cultural diversity naturally brings linguistic differences, and early childhood teachers need to ensure children receive sufficient support for development of their home language as well as uptake of the majority language. According to Lee and Harvey (2014), teachers who work with linguistically diverse children should have critical knowledge and ethical practice, in order to provide a learning environment that meets all children's needs. Creating a linguistically responsive and inclusive environment goes beyond greeting children in their home language. Teachers should aspire to be able to use the children's home language in natural and meaningful ways, so the children have the opportunity to take metalinguistic advantages (Genesee, 2008). Guo (2012) found Asian migrant children in New Zealand use their home language as a resource for learning and this needs to be encouraged by the teachers who work alongside them. This means teachers need to put in extra time and effort to affirm the children's home language and to advocate for linguistically responsive teaching programmes. As Mistry and Sood (2015) state:

Learners with EAL should be made to feel that they can use their home language in the setting and that it is valued alongside the

learning of English; therefore, to model such positive attitudes becomes very important for all those who work in the setting. (Mistry & Sood, 2015, p. 59)

### **Knowledge and Understanding about Teaching Children from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds**

As discussed in the introduction, sociocultural and ecological theories have strongly influenced philosophy, policy and practice in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Based on the work of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, these theories highlight the impact of the sociocultural context on learning and development (Smith, 2013).

According to Vygotsky, a child's cognitive development is the product of social interactions (Daniels, 2005). Learning is seen as "a collaborative and social undertaking" (Grey, 2010, p. 52). Children learn and develop as they interact with adults and their more competent and confident peers and co-construct meaning and knowledge about the world around them (Smith, 2013). Teachers play a key role in facilitating learning, and the recognition of a child's culture is essential in this process (Cullen et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2013; Ritchie, 2010). Quality relationships and interactions between teachers and Asian children are therefore essential, in order for the

children's learning to be scaffolded appropriately and to ensure culturally engaged learning.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory also recognises the importance of connections between the social and cultural environments in children's development (Ministry of Education, 1996). This theory proposes that the learning environment extends beyond the microsystem (the home or early childhood service) and looks at how the wider environment can also affect a child's well-being and development (Lee et al., 2013). The three other levels that influence children's development and learning are the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

The mesosystem consists of the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing child actively participates – for example, the relationships between the home, the early childhood centre and the local school. Bronfenbrenner emphasises “the extent and nature of knowledge and attitudes existing in one setting about the other” (Lee et al., 2013, p. 20). It is the teachers' role to identify and address attitudinal and other barriers caused by perceived and real cultural and language differences to ensure strong partnerships with Asian families are formed and maintained (Mistry & Sood, 2015).



The exosystem and macrosystem indirectly influence the child. These reflect events that occur to significant adults in the child's life within particular contexts – such as in the workplace or community, through mass media and social networks, including political and historical forces – that can influence the quality of children's experiences either positively or negatively (Ministry of Education, 1996). As such, teachers need to be aware of the complex realities of Asian families, especially new immigrant families, and support them in their parenting roles. This includes working alongside parents to try to reduce or eliminate any negative environmental influences that might affect children, for example, racial discrimination (Arndt, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2012).

### **Linking Theory to Practice**

As stated in the Practising Teacher Criteria (Education Council, 2010), all teachers need to understand the critical role they play in enabling the educational achievement of all learners. Teachers' knowledge and understanding about children's cultural backgrounds positively influences educational achievement (Ministry of Education, 2011b). Teachers need to understand how a child's social and cultural background impacts on his or her learning (Riley et al., 2012). When culturally responsive teachers plan

their programme, they consider the children's cultural backgrounds and ensure the curriculum embraces different languages and cultures.

It is essential that early childhood teachers have an understanding and awareness of Asian cultures in order to be inclusive of Asian children and families. Teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of Asian cultures are barriers for Asian children to experience equitable learning opportunities (Guo, 2005; Oh, 2012). Respecting and acknowledging diversity promotes children's self-esteem and their sense of belonging in the early childhood centre. Kirmani (2007) cites self-esteem and a sense of belonging as essential factors in culturally diverse children's educational achievement.

A child's learning can be compromised when teachers do not respect cultural differences. Research indicates there are some early childhood teachers who believe that treating every child in the same way is fair for all (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Sadly, this approach excludes children and families of different ethnicities, who have different beliefs, values and cultures, as it is usually based on a white middle-class discourse (Colvin et al., 2012; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). This "sameness-as-fairness" approach sends a message to Asian children that their home culture and language is not recognised or valued and the mainstream culture and practice is what

they are expected to adopt. This affects their positive self-image and cultural identity (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010).

According to Kearns (2014), avoiding cultural or ethnic differences does not help children to understand the cultural diversity that exists in society. Kearns (2014) also argues teachers should not make a statement that everyone is the same, because everyone is unique and different. To encourage children to know their own culture and recognise cultural differences as important also creates an opportunity to help them learn about and respect other cultures (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Teachers with cultural competencies have positive relationships and engagement with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their focus on respectful relationships promotes quality outcomes for those children with diverse learning needs (Ministry of Education, 2011b). Further, strong partnerships and effective communication with families is imperative in order for teachers to get to know, include and meet the needs of all children (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008; Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). If there is a strong reciprocal partnership between parents and teachers, and both have similar beliefs, values and understanding of the child, then the child will experience a smooth transition to early childhood education, which will be of considerable benefit to his or her development (Smith, 2014).

For many immigrant families, early childhood teachers are one of the first points of contact when they settle in a new country (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Effective communication between teachers and parents is key for their children to experience a successful transition from home to early childhood education (Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). However, according to Guo (2014), migrant parents frequently believe teachers do not wish to make conversation with them and listen to their opinions about their child's education. Such beliefs can negatively affect how a partnership between teachers and migrant families is built and maintained.

According to Zhang, Keown and Farruggia (2014), there are important implications for teaching practice in order to have effective communication between Asian parents and teachers in the early childhood setting. Their research (Zhang, Keown, & Farruggia, 2014) indicates teachers need to make a genuine effort to avoid inequality, invite Asian parents and families to become involved in a culturally appropriate manner, and ensure that any opportunity offered is relevant and meaningful to those parents and families.

For teachers to understand and be aware of diverse cultures is essential and it is fundamental to promote effective learning for Asian children in early childhood settings (Hennig & Kirova, 2012). Culturally

responsive practices encourage Asian children to fully participate and engage in the curriculum. It is by participating in culturally responsive early childhood programmes that respect the child's home language and culture that Asian children gain self-esteem and positive cultural identities. For example, an individual's name has great personal significance and learning how to correctly pronounce a child's name is fundamental to a positive relationship. Some teachers, however, shorten Asian children's names for ease and convenience or use an alternative "English" name instead. This can be viewed as disrespectful, as it ignores the child's cultural heritage and changes the meaning of the child's name (Kirmani, 2007). According to Devarakonda (2013), teachers can relate to the names of the children in a culturally responsive manner by understanding naming patterns. Teachers need to understand that their culturally irresponsible practice can negatively affect a child's self-esteem and cultural identity (Baldock, 2010). It is vital that teachers show integrity, sincerity and respect towards families' beliefs, language and culture.

The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) requires every early childhood service to build a positive and reciprocal partnership with parents and families to promote and extend the learning and development of their children. Teachers'

enthusiasm for and knowledge about diverse culture, language and heritage promotes and enhances a strong partnership between them and those families from ethnic minority backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2011b). Teachers who develop a strong connection with these families have a better understanding of children's individual learning needs (Riley et al., 2012).

Moreover, a positive and responsive relationship between teachers and children from cultural minority backgrounds is an essential aspect of high-quality early childhood education (Vuckovic, 2008; Kearns, 2014). It helps promote the children's sense of belonging and the knowledge that they are respected and valued in a wider community and society. Parents' involvement and participation in their children's education should also be encouraged and sustained, as it benefits the children's learning (Ministry of Education, 2011b). Simply knowing their children are receiving a quality education makes migrant parents feel confident to share their expectations of and aspirations for their children, and it increases their participation in early childhood education (Kearns, 2014).

### **Teachers Becoming and Being Culturally Competent**

Research highlights the importance of teachers becoming and being culturally competent (Colombo, 2005; Cullen et al., 2009; Kearns, 2014).

Cultural competence refers to “the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures” (Kearns, 2014, p. 213). Culturally competent teachers should be responsive, sensitive to, and have the skills to work with and meet the needs of culturally diverse children and their families. Teachers need to gain knowledge about the different cultures children bring to their educational setting, in order to work effectively with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds (Vuckovic, 2008). Such teachers ensure all children’s cultures, identities and strengths are acknowledged and valued (Kearns, 2014).

Teachers have a responsibility to provide an early childhood education programme that supports and includes all children and families, regardless of their differences. Research and policy highlights the teachers’ role and responsibility to support cultural minority children and promote their learning in every early childhood setting. This includes enhancing children’s learning and development through implementing strategies and providing educational programmes that value and reflect the children’s home language, culture and heritage (Education [Early Childhood Services] Regulations, 2008; Kearns, 2014; Ministry of Education, 1996; Mistry & Sood, 2015).

Lack of understanding about interculturalism can affect the relationship between a teacher and child from a minority culture and create misunderstandings between them (Colvin et al, 2012; Vuckovic, 2008). If a learning programme does not reflect a child's culture, it may not be inviting enough to draw them in and engage their interest. Many children learn through experiences they can relate to and teachers need to be proactive in response. They must improve their knowledge of diverse cultures, beliefs and values, and use culturally reflective teaching approaches to meet learners' needs.

Becoming and being culturally competent means:

- Teachers integrate examples from diverse cultures to support the curriculum, by using rich and diverse cultural resources and encouraging families to be involved in and to contribute to planning (Davarakonda, 2013; Garcia & Zamora, 2015).
- Teachers acknowledge children and families from diverse cultures who make a significant contribution in their early childhood setting and wider community (Davarakonda, 2013; Mistry & Sood, 2015).
- Teachers use a range of strategies to reduce prejudice, by using resources that reflect different cultures and having teachers and other staff from diverse cultures (Davarakonda, 2013; Mistry & Sood, 2015).



- Teachers develop a culturally responsive and appropriate teaching style, to stimulate learners from diverse cultural backgrounds (Davarakonda, 2013; Fumoto, Hargreaves & Maxwell, 2007).
- Teachers empower culture and structure their early childhood setting in order to uphold quality interactions between teachers and children and promote learning achievement (Davarakonda, 2013; Fumoto, Hargreaves & Maxwell, 2007).

Early childhood education policies that support teachers' on-going professional development and increase their understanding and awareness of diversity will positively impact on teaching practice. With increasing awareness, teachers will come to recognise the rights of and their responsibilities to the children in their care, and be able to meet the children's needs in a way that reflects every child's cultural background.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **Introduction**

I undertook this qualitative research project in order to gain insight into early childhood teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching and including children from Asian cultural backgrounds. This chapter describes the research methodology and procedures used in collecting and analysing the data. It begins by discussing the paradigms and research culture in early childhood education and goes on to describe the methodology and research tools used in this project. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data analysis.

### **Paradigms and Research Culture in Early Childhood Education**

Hughes (2010) defines paradigm as “a way to ‘see’ the world and organize it into a coherent whole” (p. 35). In brief, a paradigm is a framework containing “a belief about the nature of knowledge”, “a methodology”, and “a criteria of validity” (Hughes, 2010, p. 36). There are three main paradigms in early childhood research: positivist, interpretivist, and post-structuralist. Each paradigm will be discussed in this section.

### ***Positivist***

The positivist paradigm refers to a scientific methodology based on the belief that “the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method for studying the social world that is value free, and that explanations of a causal nature can be provided” (Mertens, 2005, p. 8). The main features of a positivist paradigm are observation and collecting data, looking for patterns and developing a theory, forming a hypothesis to test the theory, conducting research to test the hypothesis, and support or adjustment of the theory (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Research undertaken with a positivist approach means the researcher explores, discovers and analyses in scientific way. This paradigm is commonly used in quantitative research that focuses on facts and truth. It is often used to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). It is about proving facts and truth, and maximising objectivity.

### ***Interpretivist***

An interpretivist paradigm focuses on understanding the world of real human experiences. This paradigm recognises the impact of each individual’s unique perspective on the topic under investigation, as a result of their culture, background and experiences (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). It

relies on an adequate dialogue between researchers and those with whom they interact. An interpretivist approach tends to be qualitative, which is opposed to the positivist approach. While a positivist paradigm reflects a belief that universal generalisations about the world can be constructed, an interpretivist paradigm suggests each person continuously makes sense of the world within socially and culturally constructed and shared meanings (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Interpretivist researchers gain detailed insight into an issue rather than making generalisations about it.

### ***Post-structuralist***

Post-structuralism is another paradigm used in early childhood research. Researchers using a post-structuralist approach do not believe research can come to a conclusion about anything with certainty and often deconstruct existing understanding of what is normal and what constitutes truth (Brown & Jones, 2001). Post-structuralists believe ideas and knowledge are constantly changing and evolving (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Improvement and change are key components in post-structuralist research. Similar to interpretivists, post-structuralists take a qualitative approach and look at the meanings people attribute to phenomena and actions.

## **Interpretivist Knowledge and Methodology**

I selected an interpretivist framework for this research, as the interpretivist approach collects detailed qualitative data and helps a researcher understand human actions and experiences (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Interpretivists believe reality and knowledge are socially constructed, a concept which aligns with this research topic. I wanted to investigate the way in which teaching and including children from Asian cultural backgrounds is viewed and experienced by teachers within early childhood settings. Of particular interest was how and why some early childhood teachers provide a high-quality programme to children and families of Asian ethnicity, while others find it very difficult to include and accommodate these children and families in the curriculum. To address my research question, I needed to select a paradigm and research approach that would help me draw some conclusions and come to a greater understanding about inclusion, culturally responsive practice, and quality education for children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds. An interpretivist framework is a suitable fit because it allows a researcher to gather detailed qualitative data on people's perspectives and experiences and critically analyse their interpretations and constructions. This approach has been of benefit with regard to understanding the

participating early childhood teachers' attitudes towards and experiences of working with children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds.

From an interpretivist perspective, knowledge is created and constructed through social interactions between human beings within their own context. As society evolves, people continually interpret the social world – and their behaviour changes according to their interpretation (Hughes, 2010; Williamson, 2006). Interpretivist research aims to find out how people understand their social world and follow shared meanings. An interpretivist paradigm recognises context, typicality and difference (Arghode, 2012; Castellan, 2010).

Interpretivist researchers strive to learn about and gather information from people who actually have experience of the issue under investigation. In particular, their role is “to understand socially constructed, negotiated and shared meanings and re-present them as theories of human behaviour” (Hughes, 2010, p. 41). Mukherji and Albon (2010) point out that interpretivism is “a position that emphasises gaining a detailed insight into an issue as opposed to being concerned with being able to make generalisations about the world” (p. 23). Each person has a unique perspective and interprets the world in an individual way. The interpretivist approach therefore helped me to investigate and look closely at early

childhood teachers' perspectives, understanding and experience of working with children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds. Within the interpretivist research frame, I could investigate how and why some teachers provide a culturally inclusive and responsive teaching environment, while others may feel that to do so presents more of a challenge.

### **Qualitative Research**

I took a qualitative approach to this research because it was important to collect meaningful descriptive data in order to gain insight into each teacher's unique experience (Hatch & Coleman-King, 2015). I chose to use qualitative research tools, such as interviews and questionnaires. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research yields rich and detailed descriptions, which are difficult to express numerically in a quantitative way. With a qualitative approach, detailed lived experience and human behaviour can be verbally and comprehensively expressed, therefore participants' perspectives of the phenomenon under study can be investigated and explained (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Using a qualitative approach can lead to better understanding of human behaviour and experience, especially when dealing with sensitive topics such as cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education.

Qualitative research uses strategies that enable the researcher to investigate, interpret and explain social constructions and perceptions about an aspect of the social world, such as cultural inclusion (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Observations, interviews, questionnaires, document analysis, focus groups and case studies are all valuable qualitative research tools. The main aim of using qualitative research methods is to understand people's experiences and attitudes toward a certain issue. The answer qualitative research might find is often more detailed than the answer quantitative research can find. For instance, this research project aimed to find out about early childhood teachers' understanding and attitudes towards teaching children from Asian cultural backgrounds. I chose to use qualitative research methods – semi-structured face-to-face interviews or an open-ended questionnaire – and collected data that shows how and why early childhood teachers provide culturally responsive and inclusive education for children from Asian cultural backgrounds, rather than focusing on culturally responsive and inclusive education in general. Therefore, I was able to gain specific insight into the teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward this particular group of children.

This approach allowed the teachers to tell their stories, in their voice and in their own words, about their everyday experience and understanding



of culturally inclusive and culturally responsive education, which helped me gain further insight into and understanding of what quality early childhood education involves for children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds.

### **Research Strategies Used in this Project**

As previously indicated, the data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, or by means of an open-ended questionnaire.

#### ***Interviews***

An interview is a commonly used tool in qualitative research, which allows the researcher to explore and understand the interviewee's experience and opinions regarding the topic under consideration (Arghode, 2012; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). It was one of the qualitative research tools used for this project. I viewed face-to-face interviews as an important method, in order to obtain the participating teachers' opinions, detailed explanations, perceptions and attitudes towards the topic under investigation. When taking part in an interview, participants can be asked questions about a particular subject and provide answers in their own words.

The technique I used was a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. A semi-structured interview can be defined as a structured conversation (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Using a semi-structured interview allowed me to follow a particular set of questions, but also gave me the opportunity to ask more spontaneous questions as they came up, in order to gain extra detail and clarify meanings when needed. I used a pre-planned list of open-ended questions as a guide for extracting reliable, comparable and qualitative data. The open-ended questions helped me start a conversation and offered a structure for each interview. Even if some discussions were to diverge, the interview framework ensured I was able to collect usable qualitative data for this research.

This research methodology allowed me to explore the meaning and understanding behind the participating teachers' attitudes and behaviour (Edwards, 2010). It also allowed me flexibility to use my own personal and professional knowledge and understandings to explore unexpected ideas and opinions raised by the participants (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Face-to-face interviews allowed me to ask additional questions to get in-depth information from teachers about their experiences working with Asian children and families.

With this method, I had great flexibility to probe for detail in relation to any response given by an interviewee, and could adapt the questions to suit their needs, thus ensuring each question was fully understood. Using open-ended questions encourages interviewees to answer questions in any way they want, using the language they want. Thus, the open-ended interview format produced rich, detailed information about each teacher's ideas, attitudes, values and experiences in relation to cultural inclusion and exclusion of Asian children and families in the early childhood setting.

### *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires are an adaptable and economical way of collecting data in qualitative research (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). A questionnaire is often used to find out information about knowledge, attitudes, experience and behaviour. One of the most significant reasons for using this method of data collection was that it allowed teachers who did not wish to have a face-to-face interview to still share their experience. They were able to complete the questionnaire in their own time and think carefully about their responses. Instead of using a fixed-standard response questionnaire, the open-ended questionnaire format used in this project allowed participants to fully express their ideas and experiences in detail.

There are many benefits to using a questionnaire. It is a versatile and cost-effective means of collecting data. Usually, a questionnaire is a simple form with a list of questions for participants to answer. There are also many ways of distributing a questionnaire – not only in hard copy, but also via technologies such as internet and email. A questionnaire is an effective tool when used for large-scale data collection.

On the other hand, there are some disadvantages to using a questionnaire as a research tool. It may only collect a limited amount of information, which needs further explanation and responses may be based on the participants' interpretation of the questions rather than reflecting what the researcher intended (Choudhury, 2015). Participants may not give a completely honest response as they may not want to reveal the whole truth, or they may believe they would not benefit from responding in an honest and open manner (Choudhury, 2015; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). It can also be difficult to get a good response rate to questionnaires with open-ended questions, as it can take a long time to answer the questions in full when compared with other types of questionnaires, such as multi-choice, rank ordering and rating scale (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

## **Research Process**

I followed a distinct series of steps throughout this project to ensure that the process followed, research undertaken and results produced were “informative, ethical, meaningful, persuasive and significant” (Hughes, 2010, p. 32). This section discusses what each of these steps involved.

### ***Ethical considerations***

This research conforms to the ethical standards expected by the University of Canterbury, especially in relation to informed consent, confidentiality and the idea that no harm should come to participants.

I prepared my research proposal and gained ethical consent before I started approaching any teachers about taking part. I submitted my research proposal to the University of Canterbury and made an application for ethical consideration to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. The committee reviewed my application to ensure this research would be conducted with appropriate regard for ethical standards and cultural values. I also familiarised myself with the guidelines set out by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee to ensure my research followed the principles and values of the committee, including justice, safety, truthfulness, confidentiality and respect.

I guaranteed confidentiality of data and individuals, avoided unnecessary deception and minimised risk. Participation was voluntary. In order to gain the consent of participants I ensured all information provided was adequate and appropriate. Confidentiality of information was assured and risk of harm to participants was minimised. The research was sensitive to the needs of the participants and respected social constructs such as age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability and social class.

### ***Gaining consent***

I undertook this study to find out more about cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education and to try and discover what needs to be done to ensure children and families from Asian backgrounds receive and benefit from quality early childhood education.

After obtaining a list of available early childhood education services in Christchurch, and taking into consideration Education Review Office reports as well as my personal knowledge and experience, I chose kindergartens and early childhood centres in areas where many Asian families reside. I selected 11 kindergartens and 20 early childhood centres, which were either privately owned or community based. Information about this project was then emailed or posted to the owners, managers or managing

bodies, of the selected early childhood education services, requesting permission to approach teachers working in their centres.

Once permission was granted, the early childhood teachers were sent information packs about the study. These included research information sheet, consent form, the questionnaire and an interview guide. Between four and eight information packs were posted to each centre, depending on whether it was a kindergarten or childcare centre. Teachers could request further information packs, if required. All information packs were individually packaged, so teachers could take a pack each and read the information in their own time (see Appendix B). Teachers were invited to either participate in an interview or to complete the questionnaire (see Appendix C).

I visited some centres where the management team or centre manager had agreed to participate in this research to meet the teachers, explain the project and answer any questions they might have in relation to taking part. According to Mukherji and Albon (2010), people tend to participate in research, by completing questionnaires or taking part in interviews, when there is a link to their work or they know the person who conducts the research. Eighteen qualified and registered early childhood teachers working in a number of different early childhood education services in Christchurch

agreed to participate in this project. They all had experience working with Asian children and families.

### ***Interviewing early childhood teachers***

Five early childhood teachers agreed to participate in an interview. They all worked in centres attended by Asian children and families. As soon as I received their signed consent form, I phoned or emailed them to set up an interview time. I met three of the participants prior to the interview when I was visiting the centres to distribute copies of the questionnaire.

I informed the teachers they could choose the venue where they would like to be interviewed – for example, at their workplace, or at home or at the University. Mukherji and Albon (2010) highlight that participants should feel comfortable in the interview environment and the researcher should ensure the interview experience is as pleasant as possible, especially as the participants have been nice enough to give up their own time to take part. I interviewed two participants at the University, and the other three interviews were carried out at the participants' workplaces. All participants were given a copy of the interview guide to refer to during the interview.

The interviews were audio recorded. To ensure a clear recording of the whole conversation, the recording device was placed on the table



between the interviewee and me. When compared to note taking, I believe audio recording is a better method to use to accurately record a conversation between an interviewer and an interviewee, as it does not distract the interviewee during the interview (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Recording an interview is important, because it is the participant's testimony (Fielding & Thomas, 2008). It also increases the reliability and validity of their responses (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Before each interview, I introduced myself and again explained the research project. Mukherji and Albon (2010) state that as a part of informed consent, a researcher must introduce her or himself to the participant, and then re-explain the purpose of the interview and restate assurances in relation to confidentiality. I initially asked each participant to tell me about their involvement in early childhood education, and then moved on to the focus questions as outlined in the interview guide. This approach to interviewing is seen as non-threatening and is designed to help the interviewee feel at ease (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Each interview followed a basic schedule of intended supplementary questions derived from the guiding questions. My intention was to gather information about the participants' understanding and experience of including and teaching children from Asian cultures in their early childhood

setting. Facilitating a semi-structured interview gave me flexibility to probe for more detail in relation to some of the responses obtained. I could also adapt the interview where necessary to assist the participant's understanding of the questions (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

After each interview, I fully transcribed the audio recording. The completed transcripts were then sent to individual participants and they were invited to check the interview transcript to ensure all responses to the interview questions were correctly recorded and transcribed. Giving the full interview transcript to each participant for checking increases validity of the research (Fielding & Thomas, 2008; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). The participants were allowed plenty of time for this checking process, so they could thoroughly review their interview transcript and make any changes if they so wished. One participant decided to make minor changes to her interview transcript. All interviewees sent me email confirmation that they were happy with their transcripts.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was planned with sensitivity and care in order to fully investigate the teachers' understanding and experience of teaching and including children from Asian cultural backgrounds. A well-designed

questionnaire makes the questionnaire valid and the findings reliable (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). The questionnaire for this research was designed to find out about the teachers' own experience with teaching children from Asian cultural backgrounds and their perceptions and beliefs on the subject of culturally responsive teaching in early childhood settings.

Mukherji and Albon (2010) state that if questions are about attitudes, participants may give a socially acceptable response, rather than answer truthfully. Making the questionnaire anonymous can mitigate these types of issues, as participants know they can answer the questions in any way they like, without repercussions (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). In the questionnaire participants were asked to provide relevant background information and respond to eight open-ended questions in relation to working with the Asian children and their families who attend their centres.

The questionnaire and a pre-paid return envelope were included in the teacher information packs sent to the participating centres. A total of 204 questionnaires were initially sent, then 94 follow-ups. Thirteen questionnaires were returned and written statements were collected from these.

### ***Poor response rate***

When researchers undertake qualitative research using such methods as interview and questionnaire, it is difficult to predict how many people will choose to participate in the project, as they need to allow time for an interview or find time to read the questions and respond to the questionnaire (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Research indicates that a 100% response rate is difficult to achieve, especially when conducting interviews and using questionnaires (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). The level of response rate is important, however, as it makes the findings of the research more reliable and valid (Baruch & Holton, 2008).

In my situation, I believe that the teachers' demanding workloads and lack of time, as well as the impact of the series of Christchurch earthquakes and resultant trauma and personal commitments, may have contributed to the poor response rate. Some teachers I talked to recognised this research would be much valued in early childhood education but, for the above-mentioned reasons, said they were not willing to give up their valuable time to take part.

### ***My attempt to address the poor response rate***

I was concerned about the poor response rate and the impact it might have on my research and so, after consulting with my supervisor, I went back

to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee to get approval to approach another early childhood organisation outside Christchurch. After the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee reviewed and approved my request, I approached a large early childhood organisation in another region by email and telephone. However, they did not wish to participate in this study. After further consideration, I sent information packs to another 20 kindergartens in Christchurch that I had not initially approached due to low numbers of Asian children and families enrolled in their services. As a result, two more questionnaires were returned.

### **Data Analysis**

After the data was collected and transcribed, it was ready for the next stage, which is data analysis. Data analysis is the process used to review and organise the data, to sift through the information gathered and to find the answer to the research questions (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). It is when all of the data is summarised and described to find common patterns or themes (Roberts-Holmes, 2005; Silverman, 2011).

I processed the data using thematic analysis, which is a well-known method of qualitative data analysis. The data was analysed through the identification of central themes, ideas and discourses emerging from the

interviews and questionnaires. This helped me focus on identifying patterns of meanings across the data in order to find the answers to my research questions. The advantage of using this method is that it can be used in different frameworks (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Silverman, 2006). Thematic analysis is suitable for research questions designed to find out about and explore people's attitudes, perceptions and experience of a particular issue. The process I followed included familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes.

I transcribed, read, reviewed and became familiar with the data. I identified important features and words relating to the research, coded the data and collated these features to identify significant patterns and meanings. The data was coded to reflect the discourses and issues around cultural inclusion. When the key themes and ideas were identified, I reviewed and named this data and then re-reviewed and defined the data by splitting, combining and discarding it in the context of each theme. I went through all the transcript data, including interview transcripts and questionnaires. I then organised all the words, phrases and statements into meaningful categories. I used the computer by cutting and pasting data from the original documents into new documents that represented particular discourses, themes or issues.

Finally, I developed the scope and worked on a detailed analysis of each theme. In the next chapter I report on my findings in relation to quality, inclusive early childhood education for Asian children and their families.

## **Chapter 4 – Findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from data gathered in the course of this qualitative research project, derived from interviews with and questionnaires completed by fully qualified and registered early childhood teachers. The data was reviewed and evaluated using thematic analysis. As a result of this analysis, the findings were considered in the context of a number of themes, including: the teachers' perceptions of Asian parents and families as influenced by their own experience; the teachers' understanding of culturally inclusive and responsive teaching; the teachers' initial reactions and responses to teaching children from Asian cultural backgrounds; approaches used by the teachers to support and include children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds; the benefits of barriers to creating a culturally inclusive and responsive environment; and the teachers' ideas about progressing inclusive education for children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds. These themes are discussed in greater detail below.

### **Perceptions of Asian Families**

It was evident that cultural beliefs, different understandings about the purpose of education, parenting and child rearing styles influenced the



teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards Asian children and families, either positively or negatively.

All teachers were aware of the importance placed on a good education in Asian cultures. Several said Asian parents and families highly respected and valued the teachers' work and Asian children were excellent role models in the early childhood setting.

Our Asian children ... have been excellent role models for innovation and persistence. ... Families are punctual [and] value us as teachers.  
(Teacher 9, Questionnaire)

Parents I have worked with truly value you as a teacher and the work you do with their children. (Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

Another frequent comment made by the teachers was that Asian families have high expectations for their children's learning and education, particularly valuing academic subjects, such as writing, reading and counting. They also expected their children to be obedient and to follow instructions from teachers. This did not always sit comfortably with some teachers' understandings of how young children learn in quality early

childhood settings in New Zealand. These teachers believed children learn best through play and early childhood education programmes should be child-led, rather than teacher-led.

Many [Asian] families are wanting their children to learn reading, writing, numeracy etc., even when young, as opposed to social skills, which has always interested me. (Teacher 6, Questionnaire)

Asian families put a lot of pressure on their children in the centre. Yes they have high expectations of their children ... probably of the teachers as well. ... I wonder about what they know. All the free play and so much choice ... it must be really hard for them [the parents] to get an idea of how much they're [the children] learning. 'Are they really learning or playing?' (Teacher 3, Interview 07 May 2014)

[They're] very keen for the child to do the right thing, the correct thing [in] the correct way, so there is a lot of teaching. ... there is a huge expectation on the children to do the right thing and perform. (Teacher 4, Interview 30 May 2014)

Some teachers thought Asian parents tended to be overprotective of their children and did not do enough to encourage them to learn skills they need to develop independence – for example, self-help skills, such as feeding. The teachers also commented some Asian parents could be difficult to communicate with due to different beliefs and parenting styles.

[Asian mum] was so protective about her child ... she tried to put so much pressure on us with this child. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

Children from Asian backgrounds seem to have had a lot done for them. They don't seem to have basic self-help skills, such as feeding themselves. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

[It is] difficult to communicate [with Asian parents] sometimes. [They have] different [ways of] thinking about things ... [can be] demanding. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

## **Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Teaching**

The teachers believed culturally inclusive and responsive teaching is about ensuring all children and families feel welcome and included in the early childhood centre, and their home language and culture is incorporated throughout the curriculum. They understood that respecting and embracing cultural differences, knowing and being aware of cultural diversity, are crucial in order to drive and deliver culturally inclusive teaching practice. The teachers defined culturally inclusive and responsive teaching in a number of ways.

Including the child's and family's cultural values in day-to-day practice. (Teacher 1, Questionnaire)

Culturally inclusive means incorporating nga tamariki's home culture into their individual learning, the kindergarten's environment, and being proactive in getting and using resources that reflect the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the children in the class. It also means respecting different cultural values and ways of doing things, and affirming diversity. (Teacher 3, Questionnaire)

Ensuring all cultures are respected and supported. Teachers need to help the child feel a sense of belonging and show an interest in their culture. [It also means] learning words in different languages, empowering children to share aspects of their culture and language with others. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

Culturally inclusive [means] viewing all children and whānau, regardless of culture, and seeking the very best for them, regardless of culture status. Responsive teaching [means being] a teacher who responds to child and family, [is] knowledgeable and academic, has a wider knowledge of the individual child including culture, bases practice on sound theory, shows empathy, and is enthusiastic about building on learning. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

The teachers also described culturally inclusive and responsive teaching practice as being about forming partnerships with parents, working alongside them, acknowledging and supporting their aspirations for their children. Many teachers highlighted the importance of learning about and understanding the children's families and their cultural backgrounds. They also mentioned the importance of sharing and understanding different

viewpoints, in particular the beliefs and values of child rearing and parenting styles favoured by Asian parents and families.

Meeting peoples' [needs] according to their own worldview and values for how they and their children live. (Teacher 5, Questionnaire)

Learning about the way a whānau does things in their home life and parenting choices ... integrating their aspirations into our programme. (Teacher 6, Questionnaire)

Knowledge and understanding of the children's culture, language and practices ... recognition of their parents' aspirations and expectations, and an ability to ensure parents are welcomed and included in our programme. (Teacher 7, Questionnaire)

### ***Sameness approach***

Some teachers thought culturally inclusive and responsive teaching meant treating all children in the same way, regardless of their culture or ethnicity. These teachers believed this approach was fair for all.

We treat the children, all the children, in the same way ... there is no difference in Asian, Kiwi or Latin American, every child is included in my programme ... every child is the same. I treat all the children in the same way, and same to the parents ... we will never leave any child behind or not included. (Teacher 2, Interview 07 May 2014)

You know the children are children ... probably no different. I mean, I wouldn't make a difference, wouldn't say there is any difference. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

Two of the participating teachers commented that listening and responding to each child's needs sensitively, and respecting and celebrating differences, as well as treating every child equally, are also crucial to providing appropriate support and care in the early childhood setting.

Being fair, treating children the same, but also taking into account different families' cultural values and respecting and celebrating these. (Teacher 12, Questionnaire)

Treating every culture equally, but being able to listen and be sensitive to families' needs culturally. (Teacher 2, Questionnaire)

### ***Meeting Asian parents' expectations and needs***

Some teachers reported they felt challenged to fulfil expectations of culturally inclusive and responsive practice, when some parents wanted their children to be totally immersed in English while attending the centre. For instance, some parents wanted the teachers to use their child's English name and only speak English with them.

At the moment we have three new Chinese children [enrolled at the] preschool. And their parents have changed their names. For example, one girl's name is [child's Chinese name] and she's been [child's Chinese name] at home for two years and she came to preschool, just started, and suddenly everyone calls her [child's new English name]. (Teachers 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

One teacher shared in detail her experience of teaching and including an Asian child, when the child's parents had different expectations and needs. Because her mother had asked her not to, the child did not play with



other children from her ethnic group. The parents wanted the child to be fully immersed in New Zealand culture, interact with local children only, and learn English. According to the teacher, the parents did not want their child to speak her home language while at preschool. They wanted her to speak only English.

We often find that parents love their children to learn language [English]. We had a Chinese family ... [the child] started and mum didn't want her to play with any Chinese children. We didn't know at first and she wasn't particularly friendly to other Chinese children, so we were dealing with the issue of her making friends and forming relationships ... thinking she wasn't very inclusive herself or very friendly. But the background was her mum had said to her 'please, don't spend time with any Chinese children, play with only New Zealand children'. So the mum's idea was that she'd learn the language quicker ... whereas, if she plays with Chinese children she wasn't going to learn English. The mother was putting pressure on her, not to speak Chinese, wanting her to learn quickly the English language. (Teacher 3, Interview 07 May 2014)

Several teachers mentioned that some Asian parents and families did not want the teachers to use the children's home language while they were participating in the preschool programme. Such parents wanted their children to only speak English and for teachers to discourage the children from using their home language, in order to facilitate language uptake.

Many families only want their child to speak English in the centre and discourage use of home language. (Teacher 7, Questionnaire)

Some parents from Asian countries told us 'please, don't speak in Chinese'. (Teacher 2, Interview 07 May 2014)

I think the Chinese Asian parents believe that the child needs to master English before they start school. I think this is the reason they put them into preschool. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

### **Responses to Including Children and Families from Asian Backgrounds**

The teachers agreed their initial response to and the time and effort they put into getting to know children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds was particularly important, in order to promote their sense of

well-being and belonging in the early childhood centre. However, some teachers said they felt they needed to make an extra effort to communicate with or settle these children and families because of issues raised by the language barrier and cultural differences.

It's a place where they might feel they would like to belong. We are very conscious of it ... I do feel we need to go the extra mile for them.  
(Teacher 3, Interview 07 May 2014)

Sometimes I guess it's more than [promoting] an equal[ity]... that we go out of our way to try to make a real effort to make sure they are welcome and feel welcome and comfortable. (Teacher 5, Interview 08 June 2014)

I always make an effort immediately to get to know them and support them to feel safe and secure. It must be difficult for them, especially those who have just come to New Zealand from overseas, with no English. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

Some teachers reported they made an extra effort with and gave more attention to Asian children to ensure they felt included in their early childhood setting. They had developed their own strategies to help settle the children in their new learning environment, such as using the child's home language in greeting.

I try to give them extra attention, because it's very hard for these children ... I have a boy who started last year and he's been at the centre maybe seven or eight months. When he started he couldn't understand anything and it was hard for him. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

Before they come into our centre, we need to know what their background is – you know, welcome them, and use their words, like 'Ni hao' or ... just [do a] little more about welcoming them. (Teacher 5, Interview 08 June 2014)

I would like to think I treat them no differently and make an effort to ensure they are welcomed and understand our environment and programme. I endeavour to find out some basic vocabulary and to

greet children and whānau in their home language. (Teacher 7, Questionnaire)

Although teachers recognised it was important to provide additional support for Asian children and families as they settle in, some teachers felt this was a demanding process that took a long time, due to different expectations and communication difficulties.

[It can be] difficult to communicate at the start, in the first couple of weeks. So what we teachers do is talk in English as well as [using] body language, so they understand what this means. Asian families have different expectations ... [it's also about] lots of communication. We need to do more with Asian families. (Teacher 5, Interview 08 June 2014)

Communication with [Asian] families takes a lot of extra energy and time etc., for the head teacher. (Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

However the simplest of messages take a lot of extra time – for example, earthquake drills, come for lunch and bring a plate [of food],

need to see doctor because child is unwell, do they want to be included in festivities – for example, carol singing. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

### **Approaches Used to Support Children and Families from Asian Backgrounds**

All the teachers who completed the questionnaire reported various strategies they use to support and include children and families from Asian backgrounds. The teachers who took part in an interview also discussed in detail this aspect of their work. Key themes, with examples, are highlighted below.

#### ***Building meaningful relationships with Asian families***

Most teachers said they tried to include Asian children and families by making them feel welcome and by ensuring their home cultures are respected and valued in the early childhood setting. They highlighted the importance of open communication in building positive relationships and being mindful of and learning about the parents' aspirations for their children, as well as their language, cultural beliefs and practices.

We try to include them. Yes, we just show respect for the parents. We understand how hard it is for them [Asian children and their families].  
(Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

Building relationships with children and families. Open communication. Find out parent aspirations. (Teacher 1, Questionnaire)

Communicate with families about cultural background, where they come from and what language they speak at home. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

Get to know families – talk to them. Encourage them to celebrate different cultural events and beliefs. (Teacher 12, Questionnaire)

### ***Interest in expanding cultural knowledge***

The teachers responded that they tried to expand their cultural knowledge, by means of independent research and through their experiences working with children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds. They developed strategies to communicate effectively and work collaboratively

with the children in their care and their parents. One of the teachers commented that patience and communication are crucial in order to grow these relationships.

Usually some teachers do some research on the Internet, so they know what to do with the families and how we can welcome [them] more. We ask the family what their family background is, ask what they believe in and what kind of expectations they have. (Teacher 5, Interview 08 June 2014)

Under-twos ... do your best to follow the routine at home. Sleep times are hard. As a rule, they sleep together at home. [It can be] very hard to suddenly go into a cot at preschool and [it is] a big adjustment, so understanding this can take time ... [and it] is very important. Patience and communication are gold. (Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

I have learned more about their culture, practices and food through contact with them and their children. (Teacher 7, Questionnaire)



***Being receptive to new ideas and different worldviews***

Most teachers reported they were open to new ideas and always keen to learn how people from different ethnic groups view the world and the value they place on and expectations they have for their children's education. Some teachers shared the teaching strategies they implemented to show they respected and celebrated other cultures.

To respect people from different cultures, to show you care about people from different cultures. To take time to get to know them by using correct greetings in their languages, pronounce their names correctly and [have an] understanding of cultural differences. Be prepared and open to learn new ways – for example, heating lunch items, [such as] rice and noodles. (Teacher 13, Questionnaire)

Openness to other cultures and responding to the needs of the individual to ensure you show respect and support for these. (Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

Some teachers thought working with children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds had been a positive experience, as it had given

them the opportunity to increase their knowledge of other languages and cultures.

Positive experience. It has increased my knowledge of other languages, [I've] experienced other foods, have warm reciprocal relationships with families, greater understanding of how children learn a second language [and] how important to understand first language to be retained. (Teacher 13, Questionnaire)

### ***Using children's first language in curriculum***

All teachers agreed it was important to find ways to use the children's first, or home, language in the curriculum. Some teachers used basic words and simple phrases for greeting, while others used extended phrases for the children's portfolios in their home language, where appropriate. Examples of how they used the children's first language in day-to-day activities included using labels in the children's home language on lockers and on pockets for notices.

[By] making sure I was pronouncing their names correctly. Using lots of hand gestures to communicate. (Teacher 13, Questionnaire)

Use basic words from their language. (Teacher 1, Questionnaire)

Learn simple phrases in [the child's home] language. (Teacher 2, Questionnaire)

Provide info in their own language and use their language. (Teacher 3, Questionnaire)

Greet or farewell in [the] child's first language. Use labels in child's first language on lockers, pockets for notices, portfolios etc., alongside English. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

A few teachers said they were willing to put extra effort in to try and learn more about a child's first language and culture and to use this knowledge in the centre, such as singing songs and rhymes in the home language. They also reported they try to ensure the environment is culturally inclusive for everyone, by saying greetings in the children's first languages and celebrating cultural diversity in their early learning centre.

In my own centre, I try to communicate with children and families in their own languages. I have been learning and using Korean and Japanese to greet and welcome the families and children. I also collect nursery songs and rhymes in Asian languages. [I aim to] provide the children [with] an environment where they feel their cultures and languages are valued and respected. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

We learn their greetings. We write on the board 'welcome' in whatever language. We try to have examples of symbols, celebrations, ceremonies around the kindergarten ... [at] mat time, we talk about different cultures. (Teacher 4, Interview 30 May 2014)

### *Using a range of teaching strategies*

The teachers reported using a range of teaching strategies and methods to ensure programme information was communicated in a timely and appropriate fashion, including using other Asian children and parents as interpreters, using gestures and body language, and allowing additional time for enrolment and induction processes.

Use other children as interpreters. Use family members, friends or other parents as interpreters. (Teacher 5, Questionnaire)

Use same induction process to gain information, but use Asian teachers initially. For messages, a Japanese-speaking teacher confirms understanding with Japanese families. (Teacher 9, Questionnaire)

Find out how much they [Asian parents and families] know about kindergarten. Allow more time for enrolment. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

One of the teachers shared how she adapted the programme to meet the needs of Asian children and families. This teacher used Google to translate the children's learning stories to their home language, and used simple phrases along with hand gestures when communicating with parents who had limited English.

I use Google to translate learning stories to other languages. I have a box of Asian artefacts that children and families enjoy exploring. It

opens up dialogue. I use hand gestures for parents who have limited English, to explain where to [put the] lunchbox etc. [I] slow my language down – using 2–3 word phrases – so they can understand, along with gestures. (Teacher 13, Questionnaire)

Other teachers shared their stories of how they adapted the programme to make sure they provided education in a culturally responsive setting for all children. By creating opportunities to experience different cultures, they ensured their early childhood environment was comfortable and inclusive for Asian children and families as well.

Ensuring the teaching programme [provides] the children with opportunities to experience their own culture as well as New Zealand culture. Having the knowledge of and understanding [of the] children's cultural background. Responding to their needs by providing a comfortable and inclusive environment. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

One teacher stressed the importance of mutual understanding with Asian families and shared a story of how one family left their early

childhood centre because of limited communication skills and little understanding of each other and the environment.

We have a rolling kai time and one family left as they wanted a set eating time. We now talk this through with families, and ensure a mutual understanding and compromise [any issues], if necessary.  
(Teacher 9, Questionnaire)

A couple of teachers said they operated a “buddy” system – introducing newcomers to other children and families who share the same cultural background and thus giving them support to settle in.

Peer buddy with children of similar backgrounds. Introduce families to each other. (Teacher 3, Questionnaire)

Introduce, pass on phone numbers (only with permission) of other families who are of the same culture (if this is wanted). (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

### ***Reflecting cultural diversity***

All teachers said they aimed to offer activities, experiences and play resources that reflect cultural diversity and to provide an environment that reflects the cultural identities of children and families from Asian backgrounds. They achieved this by using a range of culturally inclusive and reflective resources and displays. Where possible, they also used the child's home language to communicate with and get to know the children and their families. Some teachers used familiar and traditional music and songs and provided cultural dress-ups, books and other resources that reflect the children's home culture.

Ensure there are familiar things from their own cultures visible and available to play with. (Teacher 3, Questionnaire)

Listen to Asian songs, learn them, [and] sing them often. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

We try to do that [with] music and resources. We've had puzzles that reflect their cultures and books and dramatic play, dress-ups and resources. In the family area, we've got dolls [that] represent Asian



babies, and the wok at the dough table and chopsticks and things like that for Asian cultures. (Teacher 3, Interview 07 May 2014)

Books in various languages. Puzzles. Celebrations – for example, celebrate Chinese New Year with Chinese writing. Food. Some toys. (Teacher 6, Questionnaire)

The teachers also used a range of displays that present cultural diversity in their early childhood setting and reflect the Asian children and their families' culture. Many teachers said they highlighted and celebrated cultural festivals as special events by playing cultural music, sharing authentic food and having cultural dress-ups.

Have images and artefacts which reflect their culture and backgrounds. Highlight or celebrate cultural festivals – for example, Chinese Lunar New Year. Invite parents to share their culture – music, food and clothing. Have dress-up clothing which reflects their backgrounds. (Teacher 7, Questionnaire)

Family photos, resources – dolls, boots, dress-up clothing. (Teacher 1, Questionnaire)

Some participants also provided a list of culturally responsive resources they used in their early childhood centre. One commonly used strategy was to display the world map and attach photos and simple phrases in the children's home language. Other resources – such as Asian dolls, origami papers and chopsticks – were identified as culturally reflective resources and used in dramatic and imaginary play.

Maps of world. Dress ups from Japan and other cultures, pictures [on the] wall [of] Asian environments. Visitors yearly from Japan (Preschool teachers). Japanese alphabet at writing table. Regular origami – Asian dolls in family play, puzzles, etc. (Teacher 9, Questionnaire)

A world map on wall, children show us where they come from. Chinese, Japanese, Korean books, flash cards, CDs, nursery rhymes etc. Food materials for imaginary play – chopsticks, bowl etc. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

Images, fabrics, artefacts (dragons, lucky wall hangings etc.). Photos of a parent cooking happy mouth doughnuts for Chinese New Year. Children's names written in home language on profile books, and parents encouraged to write to their child in their own language. (Teacher 7, Questionnaire)

A full Chinese tea set, Sushi set, bowls, chopsticks, dramatic play, Japanese books, origami books and paper etc. Lots of resources that support the culture in play. (Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

We have a world map with the children's photos around it. We identify which country their parents are from. We sing a greeting song in different languages – for example, Konnichiwa Everyone. We have Chinese lanterns hanging and Chinese material is used under displays. We have a display of different cultures – books, artefacts. We have Chinese proverbs on several walls. We have Chinese script translated to English in art area. We have multicultural books, puzzles, CDs, food items – for example, Wok, sushi.

International shared lunch once a term, where families bring their traditional foods to share. (Teacher 13, Questionnaire)

A number of teachers reported they have regular events to celebrate cultural diversity in their centre, with foreign children and families invited to come and share their home culture. Many such events included activities such as saying greetings and farewells in the children's home language, singing songs and playing games, and showing different cultural costumes. Sharing traditional food, however, seemed to be the most commonly used strategy employed to celebrate diversity at these cultural events. All teachers thought their centre was culturally inclusive and responsive.

They [management team] try to make cultural evenings ... also celebrate Chinese New Year and cook different style food. And I encourage my parents to write in Chinese in the children's learning books, just because this is for the child not for us ... also we learn Chinese phrases so I think we are quite inclusive. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

Many ways. Whānau are invited to make food – for example, traditional food. Teachers learn basic words – greetings and farewells. Clothing – we have children’s dress-ups – for example, Korean hand-painted dress etc. Poster – one of these has all groups represented by their names are grouped together with the name of their country and the greeting, including Māori too. Where print is seen – for example, on portfolio, locker, note pockets, have the script written in English and in child’s language (large), so it is always visible. Parents are always encouraged to speak first language at home and to celebrate cultural celebration – for example, Chinese New Year. Newspaper cuttings – often used or placed in children’s portfolios with questions – for example, did you attend the Chinese New Year festival? Library books. We have joined the Canterbury Library and we are encouraging parents (and children) to use, look at, listen to, and become familiar with music in their first language. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

One teacher gave a specific and detailed example of how their early learning centre’s environment reflects and promotes the cultural identities of children and families from Asian backgrounds. This centre creates activities

centred around a different culture each month, therefore giving the children an opportunity to learn about their own and other cultures. Involving parents was crucial to this programme, as it was all about celebrating cultural differences and being culturally inclusive.

For us, each month, we have a different cultural theme. We learn about their backgrounds, where they are from, what they eat, and what their clothes look like. A couple of months ago, it was Chinese cultural day, so we asked the Chinese families what they are wearing, what they eat, and they do, so lots of teachers also researched about and printed lots of pictures to show the children what their culture's like – what the Chinese children do and what they like to eat ... some children liked eating dumplings and rice with chopsticks. I think it is really getting involved with other families and whānau, and also set up this environment in our centre. One section is for cultural setting, like pictures. We asked the families if their child's got Chinese clothes. I remember one Chinese girl's got a [traditional] Chinese dress – a special dress. It was really cute to see. And the other children were so interested to see what they looked like. It was really colourful and they loved to see it. And that child was so happy

showing the other children. They really loved it. (Teacher 5,  
Interview 08 June 2014)

***Employing culturally diverse teachers***

Several of the teachers acknowledged the value of having teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds in their early childhood centre, as they could communicate with and work alongside children and families from the same background more effectively. Such teachers were working as interpreters and cultural mediators when required.

A Japanese teacher to chat and sing fluently with children and speak to parents, also a teacher fluent in Cantonese. (Teacher 10,  
Questionnaire)

We have another teacher from Korea, great to have her here, to deal with Korean families, and she speaks some Chinese too. (Teacher 3,  
Interview 07 May 2014)

### ***Recognising and reducing discrimination***

Most teachers acknowledged they had witnessed some discrimination against Asian children and families, and had to work on recognising and dealing with this. Some teachers reported discrimination from other families, while others reported discrimination from their teaching colleagues.

Initially I needed to do a lot of work with some Pakeha families who were not embracing of Asian ways. (Teacher 3, Questionnaire)

I have heard teachers talking about Asian children's food, complaining that it may not smell nice to them. A few Asian families that we have had, the children have had difficulty settling or sleeping at preschool and I have also heard negative comments about this, comparing different cultures I guess. (Teacher 12, Questionnaire)

I just heard from another teacher that one teacher does not like Asian children and she never [used to] take them as primary care-giver. I think until ... I think now she has had a Chinese Asian ... because now the number has increased dramatically, but before she tried to avoid that as much as possible. And we had another teacher who



definitely avoided [Asian children] too. She's gone [now]. But she never had Asian children. She just picked up Kiwi children. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

No respect [for] the children and families' culture and not responding to their needs in relation to their cultural background. (Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

Some families can be very sensitive, because they carry different thinking and values of their own culture. I would say every culture is different. We as teachers should have a positive attitude to help families to improve their children's learning in the way that they feel comfortable with. I value my own culture as well as the other cultures of the families. I hope my attitude and experience to share with the families and children will contribute to creating an inclusive learning environment for all the family and students. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

### *Using self-review and research to improve teaching practice*

Some teachers use self-review and research in order to develop their understanding, knowledge and teaching practice to continue to meet the needs of children from diverse cultures. They try to get to know the families, do their own research on a family's home culture and practice, and arrange regular meetings to review their programme planning and to discuss the children's progress in relation to different cultural or family needs.

Usually teachers do some research on the Internet, so they know what to do with the families or how we can welcome [them] more. We ask what [the] family background is, what they believe in and what kind of expectations they have ... and from this research, we can [develop our] practice to do with other children, so they know that this is part of [being] inclusive of an Asian child or Asian family. (Teacher 5, Interview 08 June 2014)

My last centre usually had a meeting or review of their programme planning to discuss the children's progress in relation to different

culture or family background. Collecting feedback from parents by holding a parents' meeting. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

### **Benefits of Creating a Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Setting**

Most teachers thought having a culturally diverse early childhood setting was beneficial for all involved. When Asian children and their families introduce their culture and language, and share it with other children and families, it enriches everyone. A diverse and positive early learning environment, rich in culture and language, provides an enhanced learning experience for all children.

It's great to have Asian families and children and their cultures in our centres. They bring another dimension to our centre. (Teacher 2, Interview 07 May 2014)

They are multicultural. So it's got to be positive ... they are children and other children are friends, then, they bring all sorts of wonderful things to our kindergarten, not just cultures. (Teacher 4, Interview 30 May 2014)

Although some teachers found it difficult to work with children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds, most said they were happy to see the children learn the mainstream language (English) and culture through their programme. They believed the children would perform better in their primary and secondary school education when they could speak fluent English. Therefore, it was their responsibility to teach the children English and support them to be part of the mainstream culture.

I think it [coming to the preschool] is great that this whānau/family will be part of this community. This is a fantastic opportunity for this child to be involved with other children, be friends with, learn to hear and speak English, and have fun alongside others. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

They pick up English language so quickly and [they] are bilingual in next in no time. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

### **Barriers to Creating a Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Setting**

Several teachers raised concerns about potential barriers to creating a culturally inclusive and responsive teaching environment for children and

families from Asian cultural backgrounds in the early childhood setting, including communication difficulties, cultural knowledge, attitudes and resources.

### *Communication difficulties*

The majority of teachers said language is the biggest barrier to creating a culturally inclusive and responsive early learning setting. They can find it difficult and challenging to communicate, especially with parents and other family members. One teacher reported that getting to know Asian families, who frequently have limited English language capability, took a great deal of time.

Language. (Teacher 1, Questionnaire)

A shared language of engagement when sharing information about learning, and about day-to-day happenings – that is, when we don't speak the same language or talk past each other. (Teacher 3, Questionnaire)

Sometimes the language barriers can be challenging. Often parents drop children off at the gate and leave. We try to communicate and sometimes it is difficult. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

Communication with parents/whānau – it is difficult at times.

Telephoning [with] urgent [messages is] challenging, [when] child is sick [and ask the family to] come to collect. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

Communication barrier if they don't speak English. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

Probably, it's hard to read the language ... I find it difficult to read the person and read the behaviour, if you don't have the language that goes with it. It just takes a longer time. (Teacher 4, Interview 30 May 2014)

### ***Cultural knowledge***

The teachers' limited knowledge about culturally inclusive teaching and learning was identified as the second biggest barrier to creating a quality

early learning setting for Asian children and families. Some teachers thought they and their colleagues needed better cultural awareness, more informed practice and greater knowledge of culturally inclusive education.

Lack of knowledge, language barrier, misreading body language.

(Teacher 5, Questionnaire)

How to encourage teachers to have cultural awareness in practice when teaching Asian children. [And] Management support. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

Ignorance from teachers. (Teacher 12, Questionnaire)

### ***Attitudes and understanding gaps***

Some teachers considered other families' and teachers' associated with the centre and their understanding gaps, negative beliefs, attitudes and responses, and poor relationships, were also barriers to creating a culturally inclusive and responsive early learning setting for Asian children and their families.

Time management ... Teachers' belief systems, if negative towards NESB [Non-English Speaking Background]. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

Poor relationships with families – not knowing what they want or expect from preschool. [And] Time. (Teacher 12, Questionnaire)

Language ... and helping families to know about what we are at. Because we have such an open programme, it might be quite foreign to what they [have] experienced in the past or know about, so that would be the barrier. (Teacher 3, Interview 07 May 2014)

Expectations [about] what the children are learning. Free-play concept can be difficult to explain to some families when [the parents] expect their children to 'study'. (Teacher 13, Questionnaire)

### ***Resources***

A few teachers said they needed access to more culturally inclusive, responsive and appropriate resources in order to support children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds. For example, telling Asian parents



about enrolment forms and child subsidy allowances available from Work and Income New Zealand was challenging for some, because of language and comprehension difficulties caused by limited knowledge of English. Having forms available in the families' home language would mitigate these problems. Some teachers also mentioned their lack of knowledge about how and where to find appropriate resources.

ECE forms and explaining the WINZ subsidy – it can be confusing if [you] can't read it in your first language. Support for parents. It is very big to leave children with people outside the family circle.

(Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

Lack of knowledge about appropriate resources. (Teacher 6, Questionnaire)

More knowledge about what families expect and resources to use.

(Teacher 6, Questionnaire)

### **Progressing Inclusive Education for Asian Children and Families**

The teachers shared some ideas about making progress toward fully inclusive education for children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds. These included early learning centres employing teachers from Asian backgrounds, more professional development and peer support opportunities, providing written information and resources in a family's home language, having designated non-contact time available to plan a culturally responsive programme, and being able to source more government funding and grants.

#### ***Teachers from Asian backgrounds***

Most teachers thought having teachers from Asian cultural backgrounds in their early childhood setting would help to provide culturally inclusive education, as those teachers could become translators, interpreters and cultural mediators.

Teachers from Asian backgrounds. (Teacher 1, Questionnaire)

Maybe a Chinese teacher or someone who speaks Chinese, as we have many Chinese children here. (Teacher 4, Questionnaire)

Having an Asian teacher. (Teacher 5, Questionnaire)

I think it would be very helpful to have a person like you [Asian interviewer], just to explain to me [about] Asian culture as well – to explain, to educate the teachers more about Asian culture and to give some advice. I think that would be great. If someone could come to the teachers meeting and help us to understand more deeply about Asian cultures, as well as [provide for] parents an introduction to Kiwi culture, to work and be involved in, and help to settle their children. That would be very helpful for me. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

### ***Professional development for teachers***

A number of teachers mentioned the need for more professional development opportunities for those who work with Asian children and families. They believed by improving their knowledge and understanding of Asian languages, cultures, customs, beliefs and values through appropriate professional development, they would be able to provide more culturally inclusive and responsive education for the children in their care.

To increase my knowledge of key phrases in other languages – for example, ‘Pass the ...?’, ‘Put on your hat’, colours and numbers. To increase [my] knowledge of their traditions and social discourses and protocols. To discuss with children the differences in the way we look. We do language well, but we need to acknowledge our different looks and why we look different. (Teacher 13, Questionnaire)

Yes, that would be great. That’s particularly what we need now in the centre, because we have so many Chinese children now and it is very popular in the Chinese community especially in [area] ... I think it’s hard for some teachers to understand their culture and if someone [were to] introduce [it] ‘this is the culture and this is how we should respect that’, it would be easier for the teachers to be more inclusive or even [to] teach students here about Asian cultures – because Asian culture is dominant in New Zealand at the moment. I think even now, at university, they have inclusive education and cultural studies [so] teachers can be more educated [and learn] particularly [useful] tips. (Teacher 1, Interview 04 May 2014)

I guess knowing a little bit more about where they come from, a little bit more about their background and how to respond. (Teacher 3, Interview 07 May 2014)

PD [Professional Development] would help. (Teacher 4, Interview 30 May 2014)

### ***Information and resources in family's home language***

Language was identified as one of the biggest barriers to providing a more culturally inclusive and responsive learning environment. Some teachers responded that having written information and resources available in a range of Asian languages would help improve communication difficulties between the home and early learning centre.

Written information is given to help understanding. Families can rely on other older child or relative to read and interpret. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

Easy access to having our brochures written in first language.  
(Teacher 9, Questionnaire)

More written resources and translations for important messages – funding and subsidies, public health messages re immunisations, new rules about birth certificates and education number. (Teacher 10, Questionnaire)

Providing more resources and information to family and children in their own language. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

***Support from other professionals***

Some teachers thought having access to interpreters and health professionals would be helpful with communication and to reduce gaps in understanding between home and the early learning setting.

Access to interpreters who understand the differences between cultural backgrounds. (Teacher 3, Questionnaire)

Access to an interpreter at the other end of the phone, available whenever we need it! (Teacher 5, Questionnaire)

A health professional who can help with severe dental decay, or other issues – this takes a lot of time sometimes, if we do it well. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

Interpreters could / should be available for some times when teachers need it – for example, [at] enrolment or when the teachers have concerns re child's development. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

***Designated non-contact planning time***

Some teachers believed they needed designated non-contact time to further their knowledge of Asian cultures and plan a more culturally responsive programme. In particular, to give children and families a positive transition experience to help them settle in the early learning environment.

Providing more time to do programme planning in relation to teaching and [to] improve Asian children's language and culture. Respecting and valuing Asian culture and language. (Teacher 11, Questionnaire)

A better transition process, to get to know and understand the needs and values of families. Resources. (Teacher 12, Questionnaire)

*Additional funding and grants*

A few teachers suggested extra government funding or access to grants would be useful to help them provide culturally inclusive and responsive education for children from Asian families.

Any kindergartens or EC [Early Childhood] facilities that have a high percentage of children from Asian cultures [should] get some additional funding – or [have] fewer children on the roll. (Teacher 8, Questionnaire)

Having a little bit of finance to get some resources that reflect individual cultures a bit more could be good ... maybe some specific games that they play in their own culture. (Teacher 3, Interview 07 May 2014)



## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Bates (2015) argues that our communities have become increasingly multicultural and as such, a level of cultural competence in teachers has never been more necessary (p.12). More and more ethnically and linguistically diverse children are attending early childhood education services in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, there has been a significant increase in the number of Asian children enrolled in early childhood education in this country (Ministry of Education, 2012). Early childhood teachers are aware of these changing demographics and do their best to meet the education and care needs of culturally diverse children and their families. However, this research highlights more could and should be done to ensure every child receives high quality early education.

This chapter outlines what this and other research tells us about inclusive and culturally responsive teaching for children from Asian backgrounds and their families. In particular, it discusses barriers to and facilitators of quality early childhood education for these children and their families. It then highlights some key strategies that may help progress cultural inclusion for Asian children and their families, such as child and family-centred practice and fostering positive relationships between teachers,

children and families, the importance of teacher education and continued professional development for teachers, hosting regular information evenings for families, and providing adequate resourcing, including financial support and equity funding. Finally, as current research and literature on this topic is limited, this chapter advocates the need for further research on inclusive and culturally responsive teaching for children and families from Asian backgrounds.

### **The Importance of Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

This study shows inclusive and culturally responsive teaching is crucial in the New Zealand early childhood education setting for three key reasons:

1. Culture is central to how children learn and develop. Children learn to communicate and understand the world through culture – including customs, behaviour, beliefs and values. Through day-to-day cultural experiences, they see, explore and discover how they should act and behave (Kearns, 2014; Pappamihel, 2004). They gain and extend their knowledge and skills by interacting with others and, through this, they create their worldview and develop an awareness of who they are.

Developing a positive cultural identity is crucial in early childhood, as it enables children to create a positive self-image and sense of identity (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010).

2. The legislative and policy context and theoretical approaches influencing early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand requires early childhood teachers to recognise and respond to the education and care needs of children from diverse cultural backgrounds (United Nations, 1989; Ministry of Education, 1996; New Zealand Government, 2008). New Zealand is a culturally diverse country. All children bring their unique culture and language to their early childhood centre. This means that different beliefs, expectations, child-rearing styles and customs all have to be accommodated, and teachers play a crucial role in ensuring these differences are valued and celebrated. Teachers should always strive to recognise and meet individual needs, and provide culturally responsive teaching for children from cultural minority groups (Ministry of Education, 1996; Ministry of Education, 2011b).

3. Culturally responsive teaching is evidence of equality and inclusion in early childhood education. Equality is about treating all children and families fairly and with respect, and ensuring equality of access to learning opportunities (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2012). Inclusion is about recognising and appreciating the benefits of having diversity represented in the early childhood setting. All children and their families have the right to quality education and care, regardless of differences such as culture, language and ethnicity. Cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education shows how teachers respond to cultural diversity and multiculturalism (Colvin et al., 2012; Harlin, Sirota, & Bailey, 2009; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2012).

Early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand realise that they need to recognise and respect cultural diversity in their centres and communities (Ministry of Education, 1996). They realise that they need to embrace unique cultures and languages that children and families bring to their early childhood settings. And they realise that they need to use culturally responsive and inclusive teaching approaches to ensure all children receive equitable learning opportunities and grow up competent and

confident learners and communicators (Kearns, 2014; Vuckovic, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2011b). How teachers and centres interpret and apply theory and policy in practice is different however, and the implications of this are highlighted in the next section.

### **Barriers to and Facilitators of Quality Early Childhood Education for Asian Children and Families**

The teachers participating in this study said there had been a noticeable increase in the number of Asian children and families enrolling in early childhood services, and meeting their education and care needs can be challenging. This research revealed the main barriers to creating a culturally inclusive and responsive teaching environment for children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds include teachers' attitudes towards Asian culture, communication difficulties, cultural awareness and knowledge, meeting parents' expectations, cultural assimilation and availability of resources. These are considered below, along with facilitators to quality inclusive early childhood education.

### ***Teachers' attitudes towards Asian culture***

The teachers' attitudes towards and perceptions about Asian culture are likely to be reflected in their teaching practice. This means the teachers' beliefs and attitudes about Asian children and families can be either barriers to or facilitators of inclusive and culturally responsive education. The discourses teachers use in relation to discussing Asian cultures tell us something about their attitudes to these children and families, and their views on teaching and including them in early childhood settings (Kearns, 2014; Vuckovic, 2008). Thus, teachers' attitudes not only affect the children's daily learning experiences in the early childhood setting, but also have an impact on how the children perceive themselves – either positively or negatively (Guo, 2006; Kearns, 2014; Pappamihel, 2004).

Every teacher has their own views, or perspectives, on Asian children and families, and these are often formed and informed by media and their own experiences. For the most part such views follow the broad trends of the culture and do not take into account individual differences (Colvin et al., 2012; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Teachers can sometimes homogenise children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds – and this approach ignores individuality and uniqueness (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). There are broad trends in every culture, but this does not

mean that all individuals from a particular culture share the same attitudes, experiences and beliefs. For example, people from the same culture can have very different experiences of and opinions about education. Several of the teachers who participated in this research made the general comment that Asian parents do not see any educational benefit from “free play” and would prefer their children to focus on academic learning. These teachers, however, may simply have been using their own cultural lens to determine what they think Asian children and families are like and what kind of support they need. This type of thinking reflects a “sameness approach”.

A sameness approach works on the assumption “if it works for one, it should work for all” – and some teachers said this was a fair approach to take, to treat all children and families in the same way. This research shows many teachers re-apply the same strategies every time new Asian children enrol in their early childhood education service. This stereotypical approach not only ignores individuality within the same ethnic group, but also reflects the commonly held belief that all Asian cultures are similar. They are not. “Asia” and “Asian” cover a broad sweep of the globe and represent the rich culture and heritage of many countries and millions of individuals.

There are positive attitudes that facilitate inclusion and quality early childhood education for children from Asian cultures and their families,

which was highlighted by teachers in this study (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008; Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Open-minded teachers listened and respected different opinions and perspectives from families with children in their care. The teachers may not have fully understood why the parents have different child-rearing styles or expectations for their child's educational achievement, but they had strong awareness of and were responsive to cultural diversity. Showing their willingness to learn and gain more knowledge about a family's linguistic and cultural background was vital to promoting children's wellbeing. In addition, the teachers' initiative in using their knowledge and skills to support these children and their families was decisive in creating a sense of belonging and feeling at home in their new community (Devarakonda 2013; Hennig & Kirova, 2012; Kirmani, 2007).

This research highlights quality early childhood education for Asian children is within reach, when supported by teachers who acknowledge all children and families are different. Those teachers who worked with each child and family, got to know them, learned to understand cultural differences, and met their individual needs, were able to ensure a positive cultural identity and self-image was promoted within the curriculum. This means each child's home language, interests, food preferences, special



celebrations and their parents' aspirations are considered and integrated in teaching practice.

### *Communication difficulties*

According to the teachers in this research, every child's culture and language should be embraced and reflected in the teaching programme to some extent. Working alongside children and families from different cultures can be challenging, however, especially when they speak English as an additional language.

All the teachers described language as the biggest barrier to creating culturally responsive and inclusive early childhood education for Asian children and families. The language barrier makes it more of a challenge for teachers to establish effective communication with children, parents and other family members, as it takes a great deal of time to make sure they understand (Chan, 2006; Chan, 2011; Guo, 2014). For example, when a child attends an early childhood centre, teachers inform parents and family about their philosophy, policy and daily routines and parents share vital information about their child. For people with limited or no English, these types of conversations can be quite difficult, which can result in strained relationships and missed learning opportunities.

Teachers who facilitated culturally responsive and inclusive education were more open-minded and willing to learn about other languages and cultures, were happy to modify the curriculum to meet the learning needs of children in their care, and used culturally reflective learning resources. For example, teachers used non-verbal cues, such as body language or pictures to get a message across and ensure it had been fully understood. Furthermore, employing teachers who can speak Asian languages, or enlisting the help of a translator as needed, were also facilitators of quality early childhood education.

### ***Cultural awareness and knowledge***

Teachers' limited knowledge about Asian cultures and how best to create a culturally inclusive teaching and learning environment also acted as a barrier to quality early childhood education for Asian children and their families. Culture is a complicated phenomenon and has many layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Ministry of Education, 1996). The outer layer of culture is obvious and most people, including teachers, relate to the stereotypical aspects of different cultures. It includes how people look, what traditional dress they wear and what kinds of food they eat. Many teachers use cultural displays, including flags, symbols and resources that represent

other cultures, in their early childhood centres. Such displays really only represent the outer layer of culture, however, and can sometimes be seen as a tokenistic response (Chan, 2006; Chan, 2011; Guo, 2014).

Most of the culturally responsive practices the teachers in this research claimed to use seemed to reflect the outer layer of culture and broad trends, such as using cultural displays of flags and other memorabilia, and sharing traditional food. The most-used strategies included making sushi, dressing up, having cultural days and asking parents and families to bring traditional dishes to share. These practices seem to be more of a perfunctory gesture towards inclusion for children and families from Asian backgrounds. A tokenistic response to culture simply does not make these children and their families feel included, it does not promote a sense of belonging in the centre, or meet their needs (Chan, 2006; Chan, 2011; Guo, 2014). Teachers' initiatives and efforts to get to know each child and family are crucial to create a sense of feeling welcome and accepted, however, this research indicates this is deficient in some early childhood education settings.

Some teachers also said Asian parents and families did not want to participate in their programme or did not show any initiative in participating in cultural events in their centre. This could be because the strategies the teachers used might not be culturally responsive for children and families

from cultural minorities. Due to different beliefs, values and perspectives, celebrating Asian culture by asking parents to bring traditional food and dress up in traditional costumes, in an environment where they have not established a sense of belonging, might simply put unwanted pressure on the families, rather than create a culturally inclusive environment (Chan, 2006; Chan, 2011; Guo, 2014). This does not just apply to families from Asian cultural backgrounds; it applies to anyone who comes to an early childhood centre. Once again, building respectful relationships are key to getting parents and families involved and encouraging them to fully participate in their child's early education (Chan, 2011; Guo, 2014; Ministry of Education, 1996).

While it can be appropriate to use cultural props, share traditional food and celebrate cultural festivals, true cultural knowledge and understanding goes beyond these outer expressions of culture (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010; Guo, 2005; Guo, 2012; Guo, 2013; Guo & Dalli, 2012). Other strategies used by teachers in this study to facilitate cultural inclusion for children and families from Asian backgrounds included reflection and self-review. Many teachers claimed they regularly reflected on their practice and the programme they provided in order to strengthen their cultural knowledge and responsiveness. Nevertheless, improving cultural awareness and

knowledge of culturally inclusive education takes time, an open and inquiring mind and access to suitable resources.

### ***Meeting parents' expectations and cultural assimilation***

The majority of teachers reported Asian parents expect their children to speak and learn in English in the early childhood setting. Therefore, they encourage Asian children to learn the mainstream culture and speak English, and believe it is their responsibility to do this as it reflects the parents' expectations. Good English language uptake is believed to be essential for the children's education success in the future.

This may suggest the teachers' practices are culturally responsive, but in reality they may be promoting cultural assimilation. While teaching English and mainstream culture to Asian children might make them "fit in" in Western society as some parents want, it does not celebrate and embrace ideas of cultural diversity, identity and individuality (Arndt, 2014; Devarakonda, 2013; Guo, 2012; Mistry & Sood, 2015).

Some of the teachers also reported Asian parents stress academic achievement, particularly literacy and numeracy, over other skills. They find it frustrating that Asian parents do not appear to understand the concept of learning through play. The teachers believed Asian parents send their

children to early childhood centres because they want them to learn English and interact with native English speakers. They (the parents) may feel proud when their children quickly pick up English language skills, but can overlook or undervalue other skills their children need as they begin their education journey. The findings emphasised that families and teachers need to work together to ensure children's holistic learning needs are met and any dilemma or difference are resolved (Guo, 2012; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Zhang, Keown & Farruggia, 2014). The teachers also claimed resources were important in relation to strengthening parents' understanding about the philosophy and purpose of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **Strategies for Progressing Cultural Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings**

This research highlights a number of factors that contribute to quality early childhood education for children and families from Asian backgrounds. Fostering positive relationships between teachers and families, professional development for teachers, information evenings for families and adequate resourcing, including financial support and equity funding, are all ways to

progress inclusive and culturally responsive education in early childhood settings.

### ***Relationships between teachers and families***

A positive and reciprocal partnership between teachers and families is crucial in early childhood settings. Such a relationship enables teachers to understand each child and their cultural background and allows the family to communicate with teachers with confidence (Cullen et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2013; Ritchie, 2010). Nevertheless, building a partnership with their child's early childhood service can be quite problematic for some Asian parents and families. Unfamiliarity with the education system and difficulties with verbal communication are particular challenges for migrant parents (Mistry & Sood, 2015; Zhang, Keown & Farruggia, 2014).

Working in partnership with Asian families is essential in order to understand their child and provide a culturally responsive and sensitive learning environment (Lee et al., 2013; Mistry & Sood, 2015). This research highlights the importance of communication between teachers and families and underlines how building effective partnerships allows teachers to utilise families' funds of knowledge and enhances the learning experience of all children.

Parental involvement in early childhood education is important, and yet it is up to parents to choose how they do this (Zhang, Keown & Farruggia, 2014). Some early childhood services expect parents to be more involved in their programmes and events than others. Working in collaboration with Asian parents and families to recognise and meet their needs and to understand their aspirations for their child is a significant part of culturally responsive teaching (Guo, 2012; Hennig & Kirova, 2012). Teachers may believe parental involvement in the early childhood centre is important, but parents may have a different point of view. While all parents and families are encouraged to be involved in their child's education, some may choose to actively participate and others may not contribute quite as much (Chan, 2006; Chan, 2011; Guo, 2014; Zhang, Keown & Farruggia, 2014). Whichever approach is taken, all families should be equally respected and equally valued.

### ***Teacher education***

Effective communication between teachers and families is key to developing meaningful relationships and creating an inclusive educational environment. Many teachers believe having teachers who speak an Asian language (or languages) in the centre is the best way to communicate with



Asian children and families. Teachers admit they do tend to leave this important job to a colleague who speaks an Asian language where possible, which is almost like having a translator on-site. While this can provide peace of mind for some teachers, it does not solve language and communication problems, as it may discourage them from making an effort to communicate with Asian families.

Those responsible for teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand have a responsibility to ensure student teachers graduate with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to provide quality learning for all children (Ministry of Education, 1996; Ministry of Education, 2011b; Riley et al., 2012). More Asian graduates, who understand Asian cultural beliefs as well as the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, would add strength to the teaching workforce, as children need to see their own cultures reflected in teachers as well. In addition, early childhood education centre management need to ensure their teachers are culturally competent and able to uphold all children's rights to have their culture, identity, abilities and strengths acknowledged and valued (Ministry of Education 2011).

### ***Professional development for teachers***

As previously mentioned, many early childhood teachers find it can be a challenge to work with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. In particular, language and cultural differences can make things difficult, and some teachers were also confused by their perceptions of the behaviour of Asian parents and children. Asian families have different beliefs and values, largely based on Confucianism as discussed in Chapter 2, which represents a way of life that can be hard for some westerners to understand.

Teachers should not feel having Asian children and families in the centre is a burden and something to be avoided, simply because they need to spend extra time and effort to communicate with and include them in day-to-day activity. It is important there should be professional development courses available for teachers who work with Asian children and families. With further training and enhanced professional knowledge, teachers can adopt a range of teaching strategies designed to include children from diverse cultural backgrounds and meet their learning needs (Colvin et al., 2012; Cullen et al., 2009). With cultural awareness, understanding and sensitivity to Asian children and families, teachers would not be tempted to apply a “one size fits all” approach. They would know how to celebrate cultural

diversity in their early childhood centre in a culturally sensitive way, and would recognise each child's individuality.

By attending professional development courses, teachers can gain knowledge of different cultural practices and develop the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with children and families across cultures. It is not just about developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences; it provides an opportunity to increase their knowledge of their own culture and enhance their worldview.

On-going professional development, empowering teachers to gain greater knowledge and understanding of Asian cultures and languages, can also improve learning outcomes for children. Of concern, however, are cuts to professional development funding in the early childhood sector (McLachlan, 2011). Cuts to or a lack of professional development funding restricts the types of courses teachers can access and is likely to have a detrimental effect on their capacity to provide quality early childhood education to priority learners. With limited opportunities for teachers to reflect, review and extend their knowledge of how to teach and meet the needs of culturally diverse children in their care, the children – from whatever cultural background – will miss out. More government funding is needed, especially for those early childhood centres with high numbers of

children from cultural minorities. Such measures would help progress the provision of quality early childhood education for all.

### *Information evenings for families*

Some Asian parents have a different perception of the role of early childhood services. They prioritise and place a high value on formal academic skills, such as reading, writing and counting. This approach may clash with the “free play” philosophy of most Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood centres.

As indicated by the teachers who took part in this research, working with children and families from Asian cultural backgrounds can be enjoyable and rewarding. Cultural differences and different expectations, however, can cause tensions between teachers and families (Guo, 2005; Guo, 2012).

Information evenings for Asian parents and families may help them understand the structure and intent of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. As most early childhood centres offer free play, information would help them understand that literacy and numeracy skills are incorporated throughout curriculum rather than taught separately. The teachers interviewed for this research all said they would like Asian parents and families to understand the benefits of free play, and how children learn

through play in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood settings.

Furthermore, some Asian families have a cultural preference for parental care at home and are unsure about early childhood education services in Aotearoa New Zealand. Information evenings would help those parents and families make a more informed decision about choosing a right early childhood service for them.

### ***Resourcing: financial support and equity funding***

Every child has a right to quality early childhood education, and additional government funding could help achieve this for Asian children and families. With such funding, teachers could access interpreters, professional development opportunities and teaching resources, and thus ensure their curriculum and teaching approaches are inclusive and culturally responsive.

At present, there is no extra financial support or equity funding for centres that have large numbers of Asian children enrolled. The language barrier, cultural differences and information gaps are just a few of the challenges that prevent some Asian children and families from accessing quality early childhood services (Guo, 2012; Mistry & Sood, 2015; Zhang, Keown & Farrugia, 2014). Information and education, as well as additional

support and funding, are needed in the current Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education setting in order to attract and meet the needs of new and culturally diverse residents.

### **The Need for Further Research**

At present, there is limited research and literature available regarding culturally inclusive and responsive teaching practice for children and families from Asian backgrounds. There is a clear need for further research in this area. More exemplars for teachers are also needed, which will help increase their knowledge about what culturally responsive learning environments and teaching practices might look like (Lee et al., 2013).

Further research could establish a comprehensive definition of what represents culturally inclusive and responsive education in the early childhood setting and determine the appropriate and desirable practice teachers should aspire to achieve. It could also serve to alert early childhood professionals of the importance of recognising each child's individuality, rather than using a sameness approach based on preconceived assumptions and perspectives, to meet the needs of children from cultural minorities.

Every child has the right to experience quality early childhood education in a learning environment where their cultural and linguistic

background is reflected and respected. Further research would reinforce the importance of this for Asian children and families in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **Conclusion**

As an early childhood teacher and researcher, I would like to see this investigation used by other early childhood teaching professionals to inform their everyday teaching practice. I would like it to raise awareness of how teaching and learning can be affected by preconceived attitudes, assumptions and perspectives, as well as teaching knowledge and ability, which can support or hinder opportunities for children from cultural minorities.

Recognition of individuality and celebration of diversity is essential in order to promote Asian children and families' rights to culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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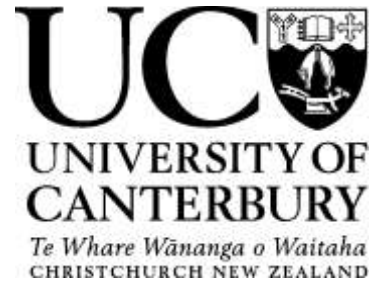
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**Appendix A**

**Information Sheets and Consent Forms for Individual  
Centre Owners/Managers and Managing Bodies**





Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Information for Managing Bodies (eg, Kindergarten Association)**

Kia ora/Ni hao/Konnichiwa/Annyunghaseyo/Hello

I am undertaking a small scale research project exploring teachers' experiences of working with linguistically and culturally diverse communities in early childhood education. As part of this project, I would like to invite teachers from a range of early childhood services in the Canterbury region to either participate in an interview or complete an anonymous questionnaire on their experiences of cultural inclusion and exclusion in an early childhood setting. In particular, I would like to invite teachers affiliated to your organisation to participate in this research.

**Researcher information**

I am a student from the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Master's in Education. My supervisors are Kerry Purdue and Glynne Mackey. I am also a fully qualified and registered early childhood teacher. I am interested in exploring teachers' understandings and experiences of cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education. With Aotearoa New Zealand becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, many early childhood teachers are faced with the challenges of how to ensure their early childhood settings are fair and equitable places for all children. In particular, I would like to hear from teachers about their experiences of including and teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood education. The aim of this study is to provide the sector with further insights into, and understandings of, inclusion, culturally responsive practice, and quality early childhood education for children and their families from Asian cultures.

**The project**

The purpose of this research is to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings. For the purposes of this study, the term Asian refers to children aged between birth to five years old who are of Korean, Chinese or Japanese descent, and their families.

**What is involved?**

I have enclosed a copy of the information sheet for teachers and interview guide/questionnaire for your information. If you consent to me approaching teachers affiliated to your organisation, I will then post this information out to some centres. The teachers in these centres can read the information sheet about the study and decide whether or not to participate in an individual interview or complete the questionnaire.

**Can teachers change their mind and withdraw from the project?**

Please note that participation in this project is voluntary. If teachers from your organisation do participate in an interview, they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If any teacher withdraws, I will do my best to remove any interview information relating to her/him, provided this is practically achievable. However, once teachers have submitted their anonymous questionnaire, they will not be able to withdraw from the project as I will have no way of matching questionnaires to individual participants.

**How will the information collected be used and what about anonymity and confidentiality?**

The information collected from the interviews and questionnaires will be reported in my Master's of Education thesis, as well as used for the purposes of publications and presentations that arise from the research. Any material used will be in no way linked to any specific participant, no real names of participants, participants' early childhood settings or locations, or the names of children and families will be used. Any identifying features will be removed.

The data collected will remain confidential to me and my supervisors. Raw data will be securely stored in a cabinet with a lock that only I have access to. As required by the University's research policy, at the completion of the project all information collected will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the University of Canterbury Library.

**How can you find out about the research findings?**

My thesis can be accessed by participants and your organisation from the

University of Canterbury library at the completion of my studies.

**Ethical consent**

The University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study. Should you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact

The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

**Further questions**

If you have any questions about the research project, you can contact me or my Supervisor, Kerry Purdue, at any time on the details below:

***Ivana's contact details:***

Ivana Youn

Postgraduate Student/EC Teacher

School of Teacher Education

University of Canterbury College of Education

Private Bag 4800

Christchurch 8140

**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.43229

**Email:** ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

***Kerry's contact details:***

Kerry Purdue

Supervisor/Lecturer in ECE

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Christchurch 8140

**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.44325

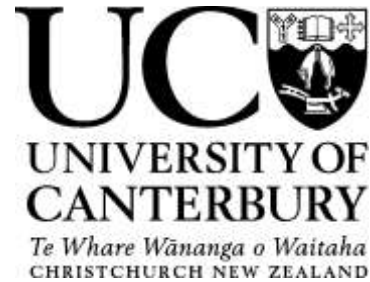
**Email:** kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz.

**What next**

I would appreciate it if you would return the signed consent form to me by email by (day/month).

Thank you

Ivana Youn



Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Information for Individual Centre Owners/Managers**

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I am undertaking a small scale research project exploring teachers' experiences of working with linguistically and culturally diverse communities in early childhood education. As part of this project, I would like to invite teachers from a range of early childhood services in the Canterbury region to either participate in an interview or complete an anonymous questionnaire on their experiences of cultural inclusion and exclusion in an early childhood setting. In particular, I would like to invite teachers from your centre to participate in this research.

**Researcher information**

I am a student from the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Master's in Education. My supervisors are Kerry Purdue and Glynne Mackey. I am also a fully qualified and registered early childhood teacher. I am interested in exploring teachers' understandings and experiences of cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education. With Aotearoa New Zealand becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, many early childhood teachers are faced with the challenges of how to ensure their early childhood settings are fair and equitable places for all children. In particular, I would like to hear from teachers about their experiences of including and teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood education. The aim of this study is to provide the sector with further insights into, and understandings of, inclusion, culturally responsive practice, and quality early childhood education for children and their families from Asian cultures.

**The project**

The purpose of this research is to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings. For the purposes of this study, the term Asian refers to children aged between birth to five years old who are of Korean, Chinese or Japanese descent, and their families.

**What is involved?**

I have enclosed a copy of the information sheet for teachers and interview guide/questionnaire for your information. If you consent to me approaching teachers at your centre, I will then post this information out to the teaching team. The teachers can read the information sheet about the study and decide whether or not to participate in an individual interview or complete the questionnaire.

**Can teachers change their mind and withdraw from the project?**

Please note that participation in this project is voluntary. If teachers from your centre do participate in an interview, they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If any teacher withdraws, I will do my best to remove any interview information relating to her/him, provided this is practically achievable. However, once teachers have submitted their anonymous questionnaire, they will not be able to withdraw from the project as I will have no way of matching questionnaires to individual participants.

**How will the information collected be used and what about anonymity and confidentiality?**

The information collected from the interviews and questionnaires will be reported in my Master's of Education thesis, as well as used for the purposes of publications and presentations that arise from the research. Any material used will be in no way linked to any specific participant, no real names of participants, participants' early childhood settings or locations, or the names of children and families will be used. Any identifying features will be removed.

The data collected will remain confidential to me and my supervisors. Raw data will be securely stored in a cabinet with a lock that only I have access to. As required by the University's research policy, at the completion of the project all information collected will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the University of Canterbury Library.

**How can you find out about the research findings?**

My thesis can be accessed by participants and centre management from the University of Canterbury library at the completion of my studies.

**Ethical consent**

The University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study. Should you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

**Further questions**

If you have any questions about the research project, you can contact me or my Supervisor, Kerry Purdue, at any time on the details below:

***Ivana's contact details:***

Ivana Youn  
Postgraduate Student/EC Teacher  
School of Teacher Education  
University of Canterbury College of Education  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140  
**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
**Email:** ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

***Kerry's contact details:***

Kerry Purdue  
Supervisor/Lecturer in ECE  
School of Teacher Education  
University of Canterbury College of Education  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140  
**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.44325  
**Email:** kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz.

**What next**

I would appreciate it if you would return the signed consent form to me by email by (day/month).

Thank you  
Ivana Youn



Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Consent Form for Managing Body for Teachers to Participate**

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of teachers affiliated to my organisation if they agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that teachers who participate in an interview can withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. I understand that withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information they have provided, provided this is practically achievable. I also understand that once teachers have submitted their anonymous questionnaire, they will not be able to withdraw from the project as the researcher will have no way of matching questionnaires to individual participants.
- I understand that any information or opinions teachers provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the University of Canterbury Library.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

- I understand that once the thesis has been completed, the findings of the research can be accessed through the University of Canterbury Library.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Ivana Youn (ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz), or her supervisor, Kerry Purdue (kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz), for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

By signing below, I agree that the teachers for which I / my board is responsible for can be approached to participate in this project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

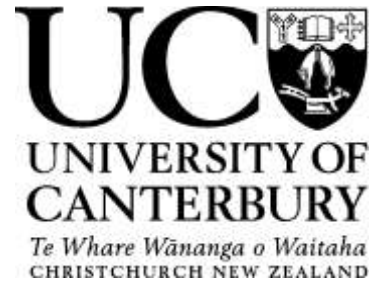
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed consent form to me by email by (day/month).

Thank you  
Ivana Youn





Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Consent Form for Centre Owners/Managers for Teachers to Participate**

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of teachers at my centre if they agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that teachers who participate in an interview can withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. I understand that withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information they have provided, provided this is practically achievable. I also understand that once teachers have submitted their anonymous questionnaire, they will not be able to withdraw from the project as the researcher will have no way of matching questionnaires to individual participants.
- I understand that any information or opinions teachers provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify participants. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the University of Canterbury Library.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

- I understand that once the thesis has been completed, the findings of the research can be accessed through the University of Canterbury Library.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Ivana Youn (ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz), or her supervisor, Kerry Purdue (kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz), for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

By signing below, I agree that the teachers for which I / my board is responsible for can be approached to participate in this project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Centre: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed consent form to me by email by (day/month).

Thank you  
Ivana Youn

**Appendix B**

**Covering Letter, Information Sheets, Consent Forms for**

**Teachers**



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Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Covering Letter for Teachers**

Kia ora/Ni hao/Konnichiwa/Annyunghaseyo/Hello

I am a student from the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Master's in Education. My supervisors are Kerry Purdue and Glynne Mackey. I am also a fully qualified and registered early childhood teacher. I am undertaking a small scale research project on teachers' understandings and experiences of cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education. With Aotearoa New Zealand becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, many early childhood teachers are faced with the challenges of how to ensure their early childhood settings are fair and equitable places for all children. I would like to hear from teachers about their experiences of including and teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood education. The aim of this study is to provide the sector with further insights into, and understandings of, inclusion, culturally responsive practice, and quality early childhood education for children and their families from Asian cultures.

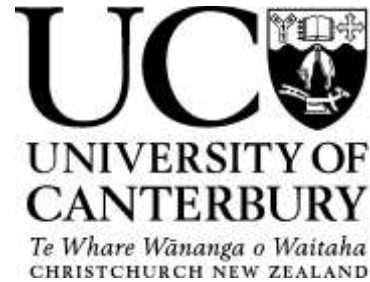
For the purposes of this study, the term Asian refers to children aged between birth to five years old who are of Korean, Chinese or Japanese descent, and their families.

Should you agree to take part in this project, I would like you to participate in an interview or complete a questionnaire on your experiences as a teacher working with children and families from Asian cultures in an early childhood setting. I have enclosed information about the study for you to read. If you decide to participate in an interview, please sign the consent form and send that back to me. If you would rather complete the questionnaire, that's fine.

Please send your completed questionnaire back to me in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided.

If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you  
Ivana Youn



Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Information Sheet for Teachers (interview)**

Kia ora/Ni hao/Konnichiwa/Annyunghaseyo/Hello

This information sheet pertains to a project exploring teachers' experiences of working with linguistically and culturally diverse communities in early childhood education. I would like to invite you to participate in the project. Your Centre Manager/Governing Body has given me approval to approach you about this project. Please read this information sheet carefully so you can decide whether or not you wish to be involved. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to participate, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and I thank you for considering my request.

**Researcher information**

I am a student from the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Master's in Education. My supervisors are Kerry Purdue and Glynne Mackey. I am also a fully qualified and registered early childhood teacher. I am interested in exploring teachers' understandings and experiences of cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education. With Aotearoa New Zealand becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, many early childhood teachers are faced with the challenges of how to ensure their early childhood settings are fair and equitable places for all children. In particular, I would like to hear from teachers about their experiences of including and teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood education. The aim of this study is to provide the sector with further insights into, and understandings of, inclusion, culturally responsive practice, and quality early childhood education for children and their families from Asian cultures.

**The project**

The purpose of this research is to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings. For the purposes of this study, the term Asian refers to children aged between birth to five years old who are of Korean, Chinese or Japanese descent, and their families.

**What is involved?**

Should you agree to take part in this project, I would like you to participate in an interview on your experiences as a teacher working with children and families from Asian cultures in an early childhood setting. The interview will be audio recorded. It will last no longer than one and a half hours, and may be shorter than this. The interview will take place in (month to be inserted), at the University of Canterbury College of Education. During the interview, I will ask you a set of questions about your experiences of working alongside linguistically and culturally diverse children and families in early childhood education. For further information on the types of questions I will be asking, please refer to the interview guide included with this information sheet.

As a follow-up to the interview, you will be asked to check your interview transcripts to ensure that all your responses to the interview questions are correctly recorded and transcribed. You have the right to change/delete any comments you do not wish to have published.

**Can you change your mind and withdraw from the project?**

Please note that participation in this project is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

**How will the information collected be used and what about anonymity and confidentiality?**

The information collected from the interview will be reported in my Master's of Education thesis, as well as used for the purposes of publications and presentations that arise from the research. Any material used will be in no way linked to any specific participant, no real names of participants, participants' early childhood settings or locations, or the names of children and families will be used. Any identifying features will be removed.

The data collected will remain confidential to me and my supervisors. Raw data will be securely stored in a cabinet with a lock that only I have access to. As required by the University's research policy, at the completion of the project all information collected will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will

be available through the University of Canterbury Library.

**How can you find out about the research findings?**

A summary of the research findings will be made available to participants at the conclusion of the project.

**Ethical consent**

The University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study. Should you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact: The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

**Further questions**

If you have any questions about the research project, you can contact me or my Supervisor, Kerry Purdue, at any time on the details below:

***Ivana's contact details:***

Ivana Youn  
Postgraduate Student/EC Teacher  
School of Teacher Education  
University of Canterbury College of Education  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140  
**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
**Email:** [ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

***Kerry's contact details:***

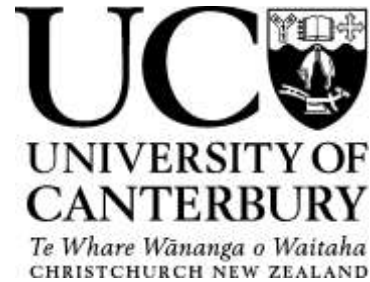
Kerry Purdue  
Supervisor/Lecturer in ECE  
School of Teacher Education  
University of Canterbury College of Education  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140  
**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.44325  
**Email:** [kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz)

**What next**

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the consent form and return it to me by email by (day/month).

Thank you  
Ivana Youn





Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Information Sheet for Teachers (questionnaire)**

Kia ora/Ni hao/Konichiwa/Annyunghaseyo/Hello

This information sheet pertains to a project exploring teachers' experiences of working with linguistically and culturally diverse communities in early childhood education. I would like to invite you to participate in the project. Your Centre Manager/Governing Body has given me approval to approach you about this project. Please read this information sheet carefully so you can decide whether or not you wish to be involved. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to participate, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and I thank you for considering my request.

**Researcher information**

I am a student from the University of Canterbury, studying towards a Master's in Education. My supervisors are Kerry Purdue and Glynne Mackey. I am also a fully qualified and registered early childhood teacher. I am interested in exploring teachers' understandings and experiences of cultural inclusion and exclusion in early childhood education. With Aotearoa New Zealand becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, many early childhood teachers are faced with the challenges of how to ensure their early childhood settings are fair and equitable places for all children. In particular, I would like to hear from teachers about their experiences of including and teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood education. The aim of this study is to provide the sector with further insights into, and understandings of, inclusion, culturally responsive practice, and quality early childhood education for children and their families from Asian cultures.

**The project**

The purpose of this research is to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, teaching children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings. For the purposes of this study, the term Asian refers to children aged between birth to five years old who are of Korean, Chinese or Japanese descent, and their families.

**What is involved?**

Should you agree to take part in this project, I would like you to complete the attached questionnaire on your experiences as a teacher working with children and families from Asian cultures in an early childhood setting. The questionnaire may take between 30 minutes and one hour to complete. The return of your questionnaire signals your consent to participate in this project.

**Can you change your mind and withdraw from the project?**

Once you have submitted your anonymous questionnaire, you will not be able to withdraw from the project as I will have no way of matching questionnaires to individual participants.

**How will the information collected be used and what about anonymity and confidentiality?**

The information collected from the questionnaires will be reported in my Master's of Education thesis, as well as used for the purposes of publications and presentations that arise from the research. Any material used will be in no way linked to any specific participant, no real names of participants, participants' early childhood settings or locations, or the names of children and families will be used. Any identifying features will be removed.

The data collected will remain confidential to me and my supervisors. Raw data will be securely stored in a cabinet with a lock that only I have access to. As required by the University's research policy, at the completion of the project all information collected will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the University of Canterbury Library.

**How can you find out about the research findings?**

My thesis can be accessed by participants from the University of Canterbury library at the completion of my studies.

**Ethical consent**

The University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study. Should you have a

complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact: The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

**Further questions**

If you have any questions about the research project, you can contact me or my Supervisor, Kerry Purdue, at any time on the details below:

***Ivana's contact details:***

Ivana Youn  
Postgraduate Student/EC Teacher  
School of Teacher Education  
University of Canterbury College of Education  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140  
**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
**Email:** ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

***Kerry's contact details:***

Kerry Purdue  
Supervisor/Lecturer in ECE  
School of Teacher Education  
University of Canterbury College of Education  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch 8140  
**Phone:** +64 3 3642987 ext.44325  
**Email:** kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz.

**What next**

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me in the envelope provided by (day/month).

Thank you  
Ivana Youn



Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Consent Form for Teachers (Interview)**

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. I understand that withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided, provided this is practically achievable.
- I understand that I will receive a copy of my interview transcript for checking. I understand that I have the right to change/delete any comments I do not wish to have published.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify me. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

- I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this research at the conclusion of the project. I have provided my email details below for this.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Ivana Youn (ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz), or her supervisor, Kerry Purdue (kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz), for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

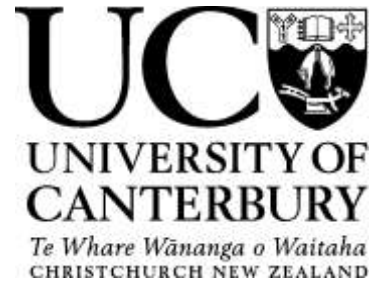
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed consent form to me by email by email by (day/month).

Thank you  
Ivana Youn



Telephone: +64 3 3642987 ext.43229  
Email: [ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Consent Information for Teachers (questionnaire)**

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that once I submit my questionnaire, I will not be able to withdraw from the project as the researcher has no way of matching questionnaires to individual participants.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify me. I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that if I wish to find out about the research findings, I can access the researcher's thesis through the University of Canterbury library at the completion of her studies.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher, Ivana Youn ([ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)), or her supervisor, Kerry Purdue

(kerry.purdue@canterbury.ac.nz), for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

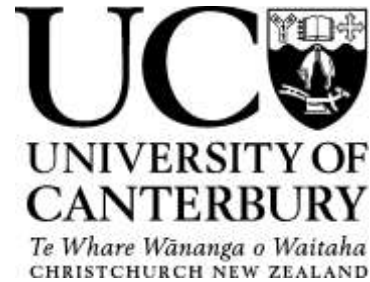
Please return the completed questionnaire to me in the attached envelope provided by (day/month).

Thank you  
Ivana Youn

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Guide and Questionnaire for Teachers**





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Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Interview Guide for Teachers**

I would like to begin with a few background questions about your involvement in early childhood education and teaching experience.

1. Please tell me about your involvement in early childhood education and teaching experience.
2. Do you currently teach in a centre where children and families from Asian backgrounds attend? Please tell me about that.

We will then talk about your experiences of including and teaching children from Asian cultures.

1. What does culturally inclusive and responsive teaching mean to you?
2. How have you experienced the inclusion and teaching of children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings?
  - Tell me about your initial reactions and responses to teaching children from Asian backgrounds.
  - Has teaching and including children from Asian backgrounds been a positive and/or negative experience for you, and why?

- What language is used by teachers, parents and children to describe Asian children and families attending your centre?
3. Tell me about what you do in practice to support and include children from Asian backgrounds and their families in your centre?
  4. Have you encountered any examples of exclusionary practices in centres in relation to teaching Asian children? If so, what happened?
  5. In what ways does the centre's environment reflect the cultural identities of children and families from Asian backgrounds?
  6. What are the barriers, if any, to creating culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood settings for children and families from Asian backgrounds?
  7. What, if anything, do you think would help you in your efforts to provide a more culturally inclusive and responsive environment for children and families from Asian backgrounds?
  8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about working with children and families from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings?



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Email: ivana.youn@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Teachers' attitudes towards, and experiences of, including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education**

**Questionnaire for Teachers**

This is a small scale research project exploring teachers' experiences of working with linguistically and culturally diverse communities in early childhood education. The aim of this study is to provide the sector with further insights into, and understanding of, inclusion, culturally responsive practice, and quality early childhood education for children and their families from Asian cultures. As part of this project, I would like to invite you to complete an anonymous questionnaire on your experience of cultural inclusion and exclusion in your early childhood setting. Your participation and contribution to this research would be of benefit to the early childhood field as we work to ensure early childhood settings are fair and equitable places for children from diverse cultural backgrounds and other minority groups.

Please answer the following questions about your involvement in early childhood education and teaching experience.

1. Please tell me about your involvement in early childhood education and teaching experience. Are you a registered and qualified teacher?
2. Do you currently teach in a centre where children and families from Asian backgrounds attend? Please tell me about that.

Please provide a response to the following questions about your experiences of including and teaching children from Asian cultures in early childhood education.

3. What does culturally inclusive and responsive teaching mean to you?
4. How have you experienced the inclusion and teaching of children from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings?
  - Tell me about your initial reactions and responses to teaching children from Asian backgrounds.
  - Has teaching and including children from Asian backgrounds been a positive and/or negative experience for you, and why?
  - What language is used by teachers, parents and children to describe Asian children and families attending your centre?
5. Tell me about what you do in practice to support and include children from Asian backgrounds and their families in your centre?
6. Have you encountered any examples of exclusionary practices in centres in relation to teaching Asian children? If so, what happened?
7. In what ways does the centre's environment reflect the cultural identities of children and families from Asian backgrounds?
8. What are the barriers, if any, to creating culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood settings for children and families from Asian backgrounds?
9. What, if anything, do you think would help you in your efforts to provide a more culturally inclusive and responsive environment for children and families from Asian backgrounds?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about working with children and families from Asian backgrounds in early childhood settings?

Please feel free to attach additional pages if you require. The questionnaire is now complete. Please return your questionnaire to me in the envelope provided by (Day/Month).

Thank you for your contribution.

Ivana Youn